The Reaper

By Edith Rickert

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THE REAPER

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BY EDITH RICKERT

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THE TOON AND THE FOLK

THERE is a little world of islands within the fastness of the Northern Sea where the years turn so softly from to-morrow into yesterday, that they are scarce marked but by the upspringing of fresh crops of *wee things*, that presently come to be dandling bairns of their own. The old men forget the count of their days; and the old women cling to the fringes of immortality.

From the digging-up of clods in chilly April to the gathering in of the frost-bitten harvest, time is measured by the herring seasons; and from the kindling of Yule-fires to the last of the weddings, by the catches of haddock. For the great fact of life is the sea. Baby eyes open upon its splendors and reflect its clear cerulean blues; bairnies and gulls and whaups share the treasures of the beach after a storm; lassies and laddies trudge up the high moorlands to the school on the hilltop, and the sea all round is the rim of their world. Sweethearting

ranges by letter all the waterways of the earth; and at the last, the sailor builds his home-nest in a sheltered cove that looks out upon the twinkling of lonely lighthouses. There he turns fisherman, and his wife, rocking her bairnies by the fire, while the wind hums down the chimney as in the rigging of ships, sings old sad songs, with her heart abreast the waves with *him*. She knows that the life-giving sea may one day clamor for its dead; the sea that was a man's nurse and the sweetheart of his youth may end by being his bane. There is no sleep for a Shetland woman when the waves run high. She lifts her toil-knotted hands with the sickness of fear in her heart, and prays against the evil day. But those that the storm spares prolong a serene old age on the warm hill-slopes, and are well content at the last to be borne on the shoulders of the young men to the kirkyard overhanging the sea.

Between the bare uplands and the barren ocean is the slender tilth of the crofter-fishermen at Snarravoe, and the ring of their low white houses between the beach and the mossy turf dyke. Above and below is the domain of the *old things:* the fairies that come out of the hills and deal kindly with wanderers that are pure of heart; the ghosts of drowned sailors that steal out of the mist on the outskirts of the safe land; *Broonie*, who gallops a

path of terror across the moorlands by night; and those *ancient ones* of the sea that lurk always within hearing of him who speaks unwisely.

And so in a life of toil and peril and love, scarcely different from that of their fathers in the days of the Norse jarl who first burned peat, live the kindly folk of Setter on Snarravoe, of whom I could tell you much, if you would listen. There is a tale of Eric the Elder and Eric the Younger, and how the sea was worsted by them, but in the end had its revenge; and of Osla, the bright-eyed, silent woman who defied widowhood, in faith unshakable that the dead would return. There is something to say of Magnie the Skipper, who has watched on deck many a night, while the *merry dancers* were shooting across the sky and the whales drove the herrings into his nets as they spun in the tides — Meggy-Betty could tell you how.

Other strange things are talked of in the toon: how old Sweeti could witch a cow or cure an elf-struck bairn; how a foolish lass would not be won until the Birrier rock was become an island; how Joram wooed one woman and was refused by another; how an old wife's sin was fostered by the wind and the sea; and how Terval at Framgord worked out his freedom, and found what he had not sought. And this is the chief of the tales.

Among the folk of the toon, you shall come to know dark-eyed Osla, tallest and proudest of the women, and Barbie, who dwelled among strangers and lost the dear home-peace; Christy, the wee "moorit lamb;" Jimmy Robertson and Joan his daughter, who are of the old Pictish people; the two ministers who fell out anent women, and the doctor who was brought from Fetlar by night — these and others; and then, Terval himself, that big man and burly, with broad blond beard and serene blue eyes unclouded by expectation, strong-handed to shape his fate to his will, strong-willed to silence the crying of hope. He is of the folk in kindred, but apart in the needs of his life. For all the years that he has heard the outward call of the sea, with his heart like a gull breasting the great waters, he has sown and husbanded and reaped the land at Framgord and has spoken no word of gainsaying. And only yester year there came to him unlooked-for harvest, strange and joyful.

There is little trace of these unrecorded lives on the broad backs of the hills, and the sea has no memory of them; but there as here with us are strong hearts that bear and wait, and weak hearts that shall find pity of God — a world perennial in love and sorrow and struggle, and the hope of things to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER I

THE SOWING OF THE SEA

It was the night of the rememberable storm when the forty-seven fishing-boats were lost off Gloup, that the seeds of Terval Saemundson's manhood were sown.

He minded well the look of the day and the little marks that set it apart from all other times that he knew. He remembered the clear-cut rim of the moors in the windless dawn, and how all the men and boys of the toon were gathered on the far hills beyond Mirka Water, to drive in the sheep for the salting. Across thirty years he could still hear the fierce barking of the dogs and the overtones and undertones of the dismayed sheep, as distinctly as if he had heard these things but the one time in his life; and he could call up at will a sharp vision of his brother Eric kneeling among mossy bilberry branches, with Hevdigarth stretching behind him, black against the yellow eastern sky — kneeling to tie up one forefoot of savage Koll (father of Wag), for handling the sheep over roughly.

Ay, and he could see yet other things. He remembered how all the world seemed to be at his feet when he stood alone in the sparse heather below the sheepfold. To the east and south were the islands, Yell and Fetlar and Whalsey and the cloudy Skerries, and Linga and Uyea and Grüney and Wedderholm. They were lying very pretty, the day — there was no name for the look of them — no name in all the world; but he believed that St. John must have seen the like of this when he wrote of jasper and emerald and sapphire and beryl and amethyst and those others that only the minister can speak rightly. He minded how he had turned to the north, where the sea runs unbroken to the Pole, and then to the northeast, and had fallen a-dreaming of Norway that was his mother-land. He remembered still with a smile how the heavy ram that he carried on his shoulders pick-a-back — for the poor beast was to be killed — gave a sudden kick that almost upset him, and how he turned, angry at being shaken out of his dream, and saw Meggy-Betty toiling up the slope. She too had a burden, a wee orphan lamb in a creel. She lingered awhile, but he was slow to recover from his vexation, and would not speak; and presently for the crying of her charge she went away.

Oh, a marvelous calm that latter day of July;

and with the coming of night, the greatest storm known in Shetland this fifty years!

His face full against the yellow sunset, he had stood on the point at Framgord and watched the out-going of the fishing-fleet. He could see the boats still, working from shore to shore of the narrow bay, as the wind puffed faintly. His heart was with them as they went steadily past tawny Hascosay with its golden sands, and the rosy cliffs of Fetlar, past green Wedderholm where the seals wallow and bark, past purple Linga to the blue hills of Unst, whence they drove out into the open until their red sails had faded to pink and had been enfolded one by one in the heavy blue curtain of sea and sky.

In the slow-falling twilight he had lingered still on the brae, stretched full length, face upward, on the close-grazed, sweet grass. I have known many like him as he must have been then: brawny, helplessly clumsy lads of fourteen, with yellow shock-heads, home-clipped, and blue eyes that stare intensely out of crimson faces whenever folk speak to them. He lay there with a sprig of fragrant, new-blossomed bell-heather between his teeth, and gazed down at the narrow crescent of the bay with its rim of white houses, at the naked peat hills behind them, towering black and misty purple against a

sky of pale gold. The sea hummed faintly below the cliffs, and far away across the valley he could hear the voice of Meggy-Betty seeking her kye. And just as the big light on the Skerries began to trail out and swing its long rays across the sea, there was a leaden chill in the air that portended change.

When he came in from feeding and housing the animals, his mother sat by the low-burning peats, and hushed wide-eyed Barbie with the old fairy song that begins: —

> The white cock is nae cock,
> Waadie, waadie.

The sound of it abides with Terval to-day as it hummed about him while he closed the door and made up the fire.

After that, he took out of a sea-chest in the corner a certain tin box of precious import to himself; and as the wind droned in the distance and fell silent again, he opened his treasure-casket and was lost in dreams centuries old. Only his father knew what these yellow papers were, and not even he why they were kept; but the boy's finger had traced its way patiently among the spidery *quheres* and *quhys* of the old Scotch, and blundered in and out among deeds written in the Norn, and still others in a strange tongue that he took to be Latin.

These he had laid apart against the day when he should be able to decipher them.

Musty, useless papers — but they told him about his forefathers, until the Erics and Tervals and Saemunds of ancient days seemed more his kin than the folk about him. They had been freeholders at Framgord since 1498, and before that, said tradition, Vikings. There was a belief in the family that they went back in an unbroken line to a jarl who fought against King Fair-Hair himself in the place that bears his name — Haroldswick. Terval knew the genealogy from the first Eric down to the youngest grandson of the remotest branch of the family in Papa Stour. This was a sore grievance to the schoolmaster, for the boy could never be got to learn a thing that was useful, although he had a sprack memory for everything outlandish in the world.

Many times the wind had droned and died away before with a sudden blare it leaped upon them and shook the stone house so that it seemed as if the flagged floor would be hurled through the roof.

Then at last Terval had looked up at his mother and the bairnie asleep in her arms.

"*He's* going to be weather, the night," he had muttered — or some such thing — but he knew by the red gleams in her eyes that she had not heard,

and that the mood of second-sight was growing within her. She leaned forward, with the palms of her hands to the fire, muttering words unintelligible.

Through the seethe and snap of the wind he could hear the underbeat of the surf on the rocks below, and he was almost sick with a sudden dumb longing to be out in the boats with the men, instead of sitting at home over the fire with the women-folk.

He rose impatiently, stuffed the parchments into their box as carelessly as if they had suddenly become rubbish, and went to stare into the blackness beyond the little window.

Behind him his mother's mumbling swelled into a shrill cry: —

"Ah! it's many a woman in Setter 'll be wailing, the morn! And it's many a babe at the breast will cry unheard! Ah — hm! Ah — hm! Ah — hee — ee!"

She clutched wee Barbie so fiercely that the little one waked and cried out.

Terval crossed the room and touched the woman's arm. "What is it you see, mother?" he asked.

But she shook him away, and her cry sank into an awesome, toneless mutter, scraps of a hymn sung often enough during the fishing season. He caught only the words, "For those in peril on the sea."

"Give me the bairnie, mother. She 's frighted."

The little girl went to him gladly, and he undressed her and tucked her in the box-bed nearest the fire.

Then he returned to his mother, with a feeling of resentment that she, who was only a Scotch-woman, could see and hear things hidden from plain-minded Norsemen like her men-folk. For all that, he could not shut out a thrill at the sense of vision in her eyes.

"The fear is on me," she moaned, "the fear is on me! They cover the sea like a harvest; and the spars of their boats rise and fall on the foam — on the foam" — She repeated the word until it was unbearable.

"Mother," cried Terval, with a rude grasp of her shoulder, "come to yoursel'."

But she mumbled on, as if she had been deaf: "Oh, the faces of them all — riding on the backs of the waves — there 'll be wailing among the women, the morn."

And Terval felt the chill of awe rippling through his brain, and his eyes smarting with unshed tears in the presence of the invisible.

"Dad?" he tried to say, but the word caught in his throat.

She did not answer directly, but her voice was

composed and musing as she added: "Na, na — there 's none can be drooned without the will o' the Lord. The sea canna have its way with them — na, na. No man in all the world can die till his doom be come."

"Will dad — dad — ?" The question would not shape itself.

He understood in some strange way, by the look that she gave him, though she spoke never a word, that it was not yet his father's time.

Then suddenly she flung her apron over her head: "Oh, the woe of it — the woe — the woe of it" — And after this, she muttered again in her Gaelic, so that her words were strange to Terval and hard to be understood.

He paced the floor from window to hearth, and his mind was with the fishing-fleet on the uplifting waves. But he did not think plainly as his father would have done, balancing the chances of muscle and nerve and will against brute violence; there was enough of the Celt in him to call up fancies of the wild storm-goddesses astride the wind, snatching at ropes and splitting sails and cracking masts, and with their lightning-spears piercing the ribs of a keel until her bones strewed the spume, and then with howls of laughter — O good Christian lad! — riding away with the souls they had gathered,

while the hissing sea coiled round and over the wreck. . . .

"I would like fine to be out with the men," was the end of all his thought, as he built up the peats into a pyramid of flame on the square, projecting hearth.

Towards midnight the wind lowered its uproar to an intricate, monotonous song that soothed the heart while it saddened. The clock on the high chimney-piece began to strike; but Terval never knew the hour, for before it had done he seemed to be walking between two wind-blown fields of ripening oats. As he went he shouted his father's name until his throat ached bitterly, and yet it seemed that he made no sound at all. Before him was the bare and glittering sea, and on either side uprose the black hills with no living thing upon them. He was choking with heavy sobs that could not win out. And presently he met folk, strangers, walking towards him two and two, always a man and a woman together. And each time that they drew near he struggled to ask word of his father, but could not for the thickness in his throat. And each time they looked at him sadly and shook their heads. He knew well enough that they were his forebears, kirkward bent. And after the last of them, he turned to follow the way they were going,

but kept all the while looking back for the fishermen to come up from the sea. And at last he was left alone between the ranks of yellow grain, and even as he wondered the kirk bell began to toll for one that was dead. . . .

This grew suddenly into a strange tumult of sound that startled him to his feet broad awake.

In the flare of the lamp that poured an unsteady column of smoke towards the ceiling he could see the door banging heavily to and fro in the grip of the wind. Through the narrow entry the storm was plunging with a roar that deafened the senses. He rushed to the lamp and turned the flame out, pushed his way to the door and secured it against another inroad. Then it was that he perceived in the firelight that his mother was away.

It was hardly a matter for distress. She would be going to the toon, of course; and well she knew the road, by night as by day. It might be that her heart would be eased when she had talked with the other women.

All at once the house was still. The wind had dropped, and there was no sound but the steady beat and splash of the rain on the stones, and the murmurous seethe and withdrawal of the billows under the cliffs. In his weariness, Terval flung himself on the bed beside wee Barbara and passed

into a heavy sleep. He would not undress, because of a dim thought that there might come a sudden need in the night — a cry from the toon below. . . .

He was roused by the creeping of cautious footsteps, and perceived his mother cross the room and set something on the table. The raindrops on the brown wool hap that covered her head and shoulders glistened like jewels in the firelight. He was about to cry out to her, but there was something curious about her doings that fairly stopped his breath. He watched her while she threw aside her steaming shawl, mud-plastered boots, and heavy outer skirt, and drew her chair close to the fire. Then she came and stood over him, but he could not lift his eyes above her striped petticoat.

She returned to the fire, and presently in a state between sleeping and waking, he heard a rattle as of glass. Perhaps he dozed again; but at last he sat up, fully awake, at a pungent smell in the room. She was muttering to herself now, and holding a glass half full of brown liquor against the firelight. Her black hair was falling about her ears, and the hand that held the glass trembled violently. All the while she mumbled and gesticulated, snuffling, and now and then wiping away the easy tears.

At first Terval sat frozen by this unbelievable horror. There had been men in the village — two —

three; but a woman — his mother! He dug his finger-nails into his eyes with a savage feeling that he must be rid of the nightmare at any cost, and when he looked up again the thing was still true.

At the sudden clatter of his boots on the stone floor she started and turned, the glass slipped and splintered, sending a trail of liquor across to his feet. A moment she was stiff, then reading the dumb reproach in his eyes, got to her feet and cursed him in a babble of strange sounds that broke about him as waves about a rock. He was mute and still until, in the very impotence of her drunken violence, she swayed; then he saved her from falling, dragged her to the farther bed, and flung a quilt over her.

It was just then that he walked to the window and perceived the first streaks of dawn over Hevdigarth. He opened the door to be rid of the dense smell of whiskey that filled the room. The wind no longer flung the stinging salt against his face. There was a subdued humming of mighty breakers below, but the air was quiet enough, so that he could hear across the valley the cries of the whaups on the roof at Crussafield, where Meggy-Betty lived.

Everywhere the storm had left its trail. The tide ran like a mill-race up the *voe;* and as the boy stood at the gate, the pale light showed him black streaks

of seaweed blotched over with dead fish upon the rosy sands below the mica caves. The twin promontories were smoking with spindrift, and now and again they seemed to go under a white cloud; and at the head of the voe a ring of lights told of anxious hearts keeping vigil.

Even as Terval watched, the lamps were darkened, one by one, and the road became black with groups of those who had found the dawn upon them. It was many hours too early to look for news, but their hearts were all seaward.

It seemed inconsiderate of God that after that night of tempest the sun should rise in his time and send a harsh glitter across the curdled ocean. Terval stood hours-long in the doorway, while Barbie chattered at his feet over her pebble houses, and with his father's old glass ranged the horizon for a sail. The sea was quietened marvelously, but had a strange empty look, as if no boat should ever ride there again.

It was near mid-morning, his mother still asleep, the cows driven out to pasture and the lambs cared for, Barbie's porridge and his own made and eaten and the washing-up ended, when again leaning over the gate of the garth, he saw a man descending the hill-road from Gossabrough. He watched the people come out of their houses and go to meet him,

though some shrank back as if they could not bear the news.

It seemed then as if his heart leaped down among them; but he did not stir. There could be no question that his place was by his mother at that time.

The news was ill, as he could tell from afar. Here and there a woman threw up her arms and the others closed about her and led her away. Now and then a sound of wailing drifted across the valley, but not often, for the women were Norse, and bore in silence their morning sorrow after the night watches. There came a man from Burra-way, later, one from Gloup; and then the folk seemed to be swept apart as by a great wave of trouble. By ones and twos they broke away from the messenger of ill, went silently into their homes and closed the doors.

At this Terval's power of endurance came to an end. The gate leaped open under his hand, and he had turned to scramble down the brae when the sound of falling pebbles told him that some one was climbing up.

He waited then until a girl appeared — Meggy-Betty — her eyes red with weeping and her straight brown hair blown in unsightly strands about her ears. She had forgotten her hap as usual.

"They 're come ashore, Terval," she called from below.

He drew a long breath, but said nothing.

"Where 's your mother?" she asked when she had reached the gate where he stood.

He remembered how his cheeks had scorched as he answered slowly, "Asleep."

She made some slight exclamation, but continued at once: "Poor body! It 's awful work, the day. They 'll be bringing him home soon."

"Is he dead?" asked Terval then, in an undertone.

"Na, na, no such thing." She began with a sort of quivering eagerness, stopped and concluded slowly: "They say — he 'll never walk again."

He looked at her in silence.

Suddenly she laid her head on the top of the gate, whispering: "There 's more as two score o' the boats no been seen, and only six come home."

And still he could not speak; and she went on, almost as if dreading his silence: "It seems wicked-like — all our own safe — and scarce another house but has one or more gone — the six Peterson boys — and Ole Johnson, with Jimmy and Rob and Mary's husband, ye ken, Henry Paulson — oh! it 's just pitiful — Terval, can ye no say anything? I 'm come to help your mother" —

At this Terval moved and lifted his head. "Na," he interrupted curtly. "I can do that."

She looked at him wistfully, pulling at her apron. "But" — she insisted.

"Geng your ways, lass. Ye can do nothing here."

There had come a sudden wonder into her wistful eyes; and in the same moment he knew that he had strangely outgrown her.

Slowly and awkwardly she began to descend, but stopped when only her head still showed above the bank. "Ye 'll let me know at all, if" —

He nodded, turned away abruptly, and with his hands stretched before him felt his way back to the house.

At the doorway stood his mother, staring wildly from under her hand, as if she could not bear the light. Wee Barbie clung whimpering to her skirts.

As he watched the two of them, Terval had his first faint understanding of the shame that had come to the hearth; but as yet he knew little of the sorrow that would be presently borne over the hills. He was dimly aware that there had been in the night a terrible sowing of new things, and that his was to care for the harvest.

He picked up the fretful bairn and soothed her, saying to the woman: "Come ben, mother; I have a thing to tell thee."

CHAPTER II

THE TIME OF HUSBANDRY

And so for thirty years Terval and his mother had faced each other across the square white hearth; and between them Sorrow had her chair, a friendly guest and companionable. She had come in softly with the dawn after the great storm, and her presence had filled the house when the men of Gloup bore down from the hills the wreck of a man who had once been Eric Saemundson. Those first days Terval had hated the Guest, staring at her dry-eyed and with clenched fists as he lay behind the peat-stack, frowning at the floor of the ocean. It was as smooth and dead and blue as the paint on their kitchen wall, he had thought bitterly, now that the need for calm was past. And while the villagers dug graves in the sandy kirkyard and patiently bore their dead — a silent line of men and boys trailing over the long hill-road from Gloup — while his father lay in bed gnawing his under lip to keep down the shrieks of pain, and his mother rocked herself, moaning incessantly, with her apron over her head, and while his brother Eric sat help-

less on the settle, stupid with the memory of that night, — in those days Terval came to know that the Guest would bide with them and that it was his part to make her welcome. And although he was but fourteen, he towered almost at once into the full stature of manhood.

When the first of the mourning was over he had sent Meggy-Betty home — she had come presently for all his denying — and he and Eric took upon themselves the work of the croft and the house.

By the coming on of winter there were few signs of the storm beyond the scarcely grassed mounds in the kirkyard, the brown faces of the sailor lads who had returned home — as many as could — to take the places of those that were gone, and the agony of the strong man who lay at Framgord and could not die, or live.

Life was hard enough then, but simple — so simple that it needed no thinking about, only doing. The hay crop was brought in as usual, and the harvest, with neighbors' help. Over this last the two boys had fairly a falling out, so bent was Terval upon managing alone. He had always a foolish pride in such matters, and a slow obstinacy that was invulnerable even to time. But on this occasion he yielded at length, having in mind how much he was needed in the house, not only for the lifting of

his father, but to see that his mother, in the stress of her trouble and anxiety, did not give way to the sin he was at such pains to hide.

The winter was heavy and lowering, with little snow, but now and again fierce storms of wind and sleet. Towards March the rheumatic fever — or whatever the doctor called the disease that crawled over his father's body, tearing bone and muscle — relaxed its grip enough so that he, with a hand on Terval's shoulder to steady him, could move from his bed to the fire ; and with that his mother began to go down into the village to talk over her troubles. Terval, curled up on the settle, watchful of every sign of fatigue in the big-boned skeleton that faced him in the armchair, sometimes grew dumb with a certain prescient fear that she would one day return as she had been that night. He might have bidden Eric to watch ; but Eric was always at the joiner's, playing with chips and hatching projects for a whaling trip, a voyage to the Indies, and what not. When he had once recovered — and that was soon — from the horror of his first wreck, he understood well enough what tribute was due to him as the youngest survivor.

Terval sometimes wondered how much his father knew of his mother's weakness, revealed to him the night of the great storm. Had she been like this

when she was young? He had heard something of their courtship: how his father had been washed overboard in a wreck off Barra Head, and had swum or been tossed ashore in a sandy cove; and how in the dawn, walking along a turf road, he had awakened to a sound of clear singing in a strange tongue, and had come upon a ruddy, sweet Highland lassie washing clothes knee-deep in a foamy amber burn. Had she been — like that — then? or had the thing grown upon her in the stress of many night watches? But what matter how? It was bitter fact.

They never spoke of the woman; they talked of the sea and its ways. And Terval listened to strange stories of shipwreck and peril from Labrador to Hawaii. Chiefly he longed to hear of that last mischievous night; but on this his father was dumb.

"Ask Eric," he would say; but, although Eric would talk, and freely, that was not what Terval wanted. He knew the story of magnificent endurance well enough; but of how his father had felt, and what he had thought, he had no conception. Whenever he closed his eyes he had a vision of the little craft with her splintered mast driving through foam above — below — all round; he could see the three men on the thwarts, bent low to the gun-

wales, rowing — rowing; Eric bailing, but not so fast as the water poured in; he could see Tommy Sutherland fall over, and hear his father roar at him to be up and stick to it — could see him drop again beyond the power of men to lift him; could see Eric stop his bailing and struggle to raise the man's head above the water in the boat until it was plainly useless: and then, just the two of them rowing until the other man faltered and pulled slow, and Eric must stop bailing and take oars until his father had rigged up — God knows in what fashion! — a rag of a sail. After that the story became confused; but the Gloup man, who had stood at dawn on the rock overhanging the *gjo* of Liljaland, saw a dim outline, it might be the ghost of a fishing-boat, beached high in the sand by the outgoing tide. He hurried down and found it half full of water with two dead men a-wash, and in the stern a living man with glassy eyes that frowned at the wall of cliff and saw nothing. They say that he held the sheet in his right hand and the tiller under his arm, and that he must have been bailing all the while to keep her afloat, and that he propped the boy's head between his knees above the water. And when the Gloup man had cried out and brought help to carry them, they said that Eric Saemundson had put the men all aside and with what strength they knew not

had flung the lad across his shoulders and tramped ashore, looking strangely large in his yellow oil-skins, with the wind parting his yellow beard and the first glint of the sun in his eyes. And he had climbed steadily along the sheep-track up the cliff, the while that they watched him stupid with wonder; and had laid down his burden at the door of the nearest cottage, and after that he would walk no more alone to the end of his days. But of these things that he had done, or what he thought about them, no word ever crossed his lips. It is possible, even probable, that he did not think at all.

The end had been swift on one of the first days of the spring. His mother had come home a little — strange; it was no more than that. Terval saw and tried to hurry her ben, but the look in his father's eyes said that it was too late. He rose from his chair, with the sudden, strong movement that had always been his way, took a sharp stride forward, with clear eyes so penetrating that the woman shrank and whimpered. He opened his lips to speak; but the words never came. He fell back in his chair, with a film gathering over the keen eyes. The doctor, when he came, understood well enough what had happened, but the matter was none the better for that.

Thirty years — and Terval's beard had come

and lengthened imperceptibly, while he sowed and reaped and harvested the barley and black oats; but the things that had filled his life during that generation of men might have been counted on the fingers of one hand.

There was Eric, who had married and gone whaling on a ship lost sight of fifteen years ago — that was the first change. Terval smiled to remember how it was himself who had turned hot and uncomfortable when his brother spoke of marrying Osla Petersdaughter. It was the sense of separation that appalled him. They two boys had worked the croft together, and one of them was suddenly a man and like to have a but-and-ben of his own. Ay, ay, he could manage well enough, he had said — it was not that — he and the old woman together; but there was all the while a feeling that Eric was become a stranger to him, and moved in another world — a country of shifting shapes and shadows that he could not understand.

He had managed well enough, though there was no going to sea for him. No, no, it was his to sow and reap; and Eric's to lie at the bottom of the Greenland ocean.

He was kind to the widow and her bairns. Gossip even whispered dimly of another wedding in the future, but no such thought had ever

entered the head of either of the two. And when Osla stood again on her own feet, and the lad and lassie were big enough to help her a bit, he went on in the old way, with never a thought for her otherwise. And so much for Eric.

But again there was Barbara; and of her he could never think without a puzzled frown and a stroking and tugging at his beard. It was a marvel how the lass had grown up so quickly. One day she would be screaming when he tried to comb her tangled red mop of hair; the next, he would be carrying her across the moors to school in the starlit winter dawns, as he minded his father had carried him; and now and again he would bring her home, wrapped in a huge sheepskin, through a whirling drift of snow. Then suddenly one day she was done with the school and had a two-three of young lads always following her to the sewing classes and "spinnies" and Yule parties, and even to the kirk. He had thought no harm, for she still ran barefoot through the heather when she pleased, with her hair blowing in the wind, brighter than the wool of any *moorit* lamb. No harm he had thought until the fishing-gentleman had come from London and carried her off before most of the toon knew that she had ever spoken with him. It was not that she went unwillingly—no, no; nor that the man was

worse than others. He came from the South, that was all; and there was no Norse blood in his veins. They were married fast enough in the square church on the hill in Lerwick; and when the Englishman would have given her a silk dress for the wedding, Terval had set his foot down and bought her one himself. Well, well, that was nearly ten years ago; but he could not feel that he had not been in some wise to blame.

And after Barbara was gone, what then? The years sped round softly and brought no change. They lived much alone, he and his mother, for the reason that he hoped would never be known. There were times when he fought for her and she with him; but these passed and gave way to long days of unbroken toil and a quiet evening pipe over the gate of the garth. It was good to be alive, when the sun was dipping behind the hills and the lark trilling above the upspringing corn in the *simmer dim* of a June midnight. And in the wintertide, with a bit of dry fish, a bowl of buttermilk, a book before the turf fire and the storm without — a man might well be content.

Dreams there might be, but for the most part not troublous. If ever they began to prick and sting with vain thoughts of the things set apart, the pale

friendly Guest by the hearth knew well how to banish them.

And thus to Terval in his forty-fifth year was drawing near the time of harvest.

CHAPTER III

STRAWS IN THE WIND

THE fortnightly advent of the St. Sunniva into Snarravoe is not to be missed lightly ; and even in the middle of August, when the haymaking is hastened lest the weather break up, there are many folk who will not forego the steamer.

But Terval was never among these. When the first long-drawn, sonorous whistle penetrated the silence of the voe, startling the gulls from their roosts on the tottering herring-pier, he never so much as looked up, although on many of the breezy uplands folk leaned on their rakes and shaded their eyes toward the open sea. He knew as well as the fishermen mending their nets in the sunny meadow behind the kirk that the noise came from a parcel of laddies with " Holy Peter " at their head, who were blowing into empty bottles among the mica caves behind the Post Office — for the fun of seeing a few of the dull-eared straggle down to the landing.

When the real signal came, faint with distance, the laddies with conspicuous innocence were idling

about the pier, getting in the way of the flit-boatmen.

Then Terval left off turning over the grass and came down as far as the gate of the garth just to see the crimson and black and gold sea-bird swing up the voe.

She never went to the head — there was not water for that, be sure, and she would have smashed the pier to driftwood if she could have got to it; but hung midway at anchor while the flit-boats, burdened to the water's edge with sheep or ponies or cattle, worked their way slowly out to her, and came back with sour bread (which some think a luxury beyond fragrant, new-baked scones), salt butter, and biscuits. When, as occasionally happens, a traveler comes or goes, the interest is tense.

It was in mid-August four years since, when Terval, standing thus, observed that she was very late, the day.

"Yea, yea," said his mother, in the doorway, "she were more 's two hours putting off salt and barrels for the herring at Burra, and the laird sent out eightscore sheep at Houbie, and she always works a while at Mid Yell, ye ken."

"Now how do you know all that?" demanded Terval, looking back at her with amused interest.

"Weel, you see, Jimmy Ollison is goin' up to Uyea to buy a cow. He passed by, the morn, about ten o'clock, a-runnin' like a rabbit, in that pale blue tie his sister brought him from Lerwick. And about twelve o'clock he comes sauntering back with his hands in his pockets, so I asked him had he changed his mind about the cow; and he says no, but he 'm forgot the money, and the steamer was not expected till past three anyway. I doot it 's after four?"

"It is that," said Terval, as the anchor dropped with a long rattle.

"There 's a terrible lot of sheep goin' on for this season," said the old woman, coming down to the gate.

Even from their place on the hill across the voe they could hear the bawling of the white mass that burdened the flit-boat.

One sheep, more inquisitive or bolder than his mates, leaped overboard; and speedily the voe was set out with small boats bent on heading the truant from the open sea, whither he swam with ease, in no manner surprised at his sudden dip.

By the time that he was landed with an oar — a limp bundle of wool — the flit-boat was on its return journey, and among the boxes and barrels and flour sacks sat the twenty men and boys whom important

business had called to the steamer that day, the twenty, and one more — a passenger.

For a moment Terval and his mother observed closely, then he said with decision: "It 's Peter Wilson home from London. He will have come up from Aberdeen by the St. Rögnvald last night and stayed with his mother-in-law's sister in Lerwick — ay, ay, it 's Peter."

"It will be Peter right enough," agreed the old woman, "I ken his seal-skin cap. Think you he will have news to tell us of Barbie, Terval?"

But Terval moved his great shoulders with a gesture of impatience, and asked for his tea.

She came in at once, obedient, though he could hear her snuffling a little, and knew that she stopped now and then to wipe her eyes.

She grew reminiscent when the tea was poured. News from London comes not every day of the year; and this time it stirred old feelings and memories that were best buried.

"Ay, ay," she mused, "'t will be full ten year this summer, Terval, since Barbie went away, and she 's never been home at all — never the once."

"Drink your tea, mam, before it 's cold," said Terval, not impatiently.

But her excitement was growing. "I want my lass, Terval. I say, I want my bonny lass."

"Be patient till you hear what Peter has to tell. Maybe he 's seen her."

And after tea, when the steamer had journeyed on her northward way, not to appear again for a fortnight, except for a moment on the morrow when, on her return, she would pick up the mails for the South and presumably land the man with the cow, Terval came in from the doorway and said that he would work no more with the hay that evening, but would finish up the churning and begin early on the morrow.

While the dasher was still cruddling and flopping in the creamy whirl, there came the sound of footsteps on the stones outside.

The old woman, who was wiping a plate, leaned forward with the hurried whisper: "It's Lowra Manson. Stop a bit, lad, or it will be all over the toon that ye do women's work."

He looked at her with a kind of surprise, his face reddening to the roots of his broad blond beard.

"It can do no harm, mother, for the truth to be known."

Before she could protest further, the toon gossip stood in the doorway, and her sharp little eyes took in the situation.

Terval nodded to her without stopping the slow, machine-like precision of his churning; the old

woman's face was rather red, and she glanced in an embarrassed way from her son to her visitor.

At first, indeed, Laura could only lean back in the resting-chair, with her hand to her side.

"It 's the flochtin' of my heart," she explained gasping.

Terval glanced at her a moment with a twinkle of amusement. It was the right side that she held so plaintively.

"I often tell Magnie when he 's off to the fishing that it 's maybe likely he 'll no find me in this world when he comes home again."

"Less!" clicked the old woman sympathetically.

"Ay, and sometimes I 'm thinking Dr. Cochrane doesna understand it so well as might be."

"Less and dole! Did he give you anything to take?"

"Yea, yea, that he did, two bottles; but it 's no so strong as some I 'm had," she continued pensively.

"It would need a strong medicine, Lowra," said Terval, not able altogether to hide a broad smile, "to put the heart back in its place, when it 's slipped over to the other side altogether."

"What 's your meaning, lad?" asked the visitor, sitting erect and forgetting to gasp, in her interest at a possible new symptom.

"Never mind him: it 's just his way," put in the old woman, and Terval was content to let the matter drop.

But perhaps his mother was not over-sure that he would do so, for she asked hastily, "What 's the news yonder, woman?"

"News? I ken none. But just as I was stepping along by the kirkyard, thinking to have a word with ye, while I was in the shadow of the wall, ye mind, I heard the voices of the two ministers."

"The who?" asked the old woman, for the churn had developed a sudden and fearful racket.

"The ministers," said Laura, raising her voice, "and they was quarreling awful."

"Save us!" ejaculated her one hearer, while the other bent over the churn to see if the butter were coming, and made no comment.

"I were that frightened I couldna move a step; it was like I growed there among the tall docks — ye ken the place — and the words I listened to is n't fit for a Christian's mouth — less a minister's."

She was intent trying to make out the face in a new photograph that had not stood on the chimney-piece when she was last in the room; and hence did not see that Terval was regarding her with a fixed frown.

"It were Mester Murray's voice I heard first,

uttering awful words about a black lie," she continued. "I couldna make out very well what it was, but it seemed Mester Keith was speakin' about his bein' over fond o' the lasses. He said it maybe wasna so true as the things he had heard about Mester Keith's wife" —

With a swish Terval poured the water about the rim of the churn to gather up the butter, and in his curt, close-clipped speech broke into the string of Laura's phrases to say, "Ye can finish it yourself, mam; the butter 's come."

With that he tramped off; and the two women heard his heavy footfall die away on the stony path.

"Maybe he wasna liking" — began Laura doubtfully, though her eyes gleamed.

"Never mind him — he was always queer — go on!" said the other woman eagerly.

"There 's no more to tell. He was meanin' that Mester Keith worked the poor lady to death — and ye ken we 'm all heard that. But I peeped a moment and losh! I made sure as Mester Keith would have heaved the other into the burn, big as he is. He just stood there, white and shaking as a tawtie-blossom, and then he turned and went up the hillside and left Mester Murray staring. But that 's not what I 'm come up to tell ye," she concluded. "Peter Wilson is home from London."

"Yea, yea, we saw him."

"But ye 've no spoke with him?" Laura's tone showed disappointment.

"Na, though if Terval would ever be going to the steamer like other folk — With my rheumatics it 's hard for me to get up and down the hill."

"I ken. Well, maybe ye know all ye want to know about London?"

The old woman was non-committal. "What-like did Peter find it?"

"Aw, he was glad to come away. He said you couldna rightly see it for the houses — that ye might walk like all the way from Dunrossness to Lerwick and find nothing else, and that all the people ye met ye couldna tell by their faces whether they was honest or no. He said that."

There followed a silence, during which Laura waited for the question that the other woman could not ask. At length she herself ventured, "How 's Barbie?"

"She 's weel, thanks," answered the mother stiffly.

"So Peter said," observed Laura, by no means without malice.

"Has Peter seen my bairn?" demanded the old woman, with sudden vehemence. "Lowra Manson, tell me that."

"He said she was looking fine, and the bairnies" —

"He saw them?" The hunger in the voice grew.

"Ay, he said they was as bonny as any children that ever growed up here in Setter."

"We 'm" — the old woman made a desperate effort to recover herself — "we 'm no had a letter from her, the week."

By no means, as Laura knew well, being on friendly terms with the postmistress; nor the week before that, nor for many a long month.

"Aw, weel," she said sympathetically, "she 'll be coming home one of these days."

The mother lifted her apron and silently wiped away slow-falling tears.

"He said the lass was just a wee dark thing, and minded him of the South people; but the laddie were the living image of Terval, barring his hair, which were red like his mother's; and he stood up and talked the Shetland like a wee man." There was no comment upon this. "I canna think," pursued the tormentor, "how Barbie could have let them call the lassie by yon outlandish name. I canna just mind how it goes: Gweno—Gwendo"—

Then the mother looked up and lied proudly: "Terval will ken. He kens all they things. He 's at his books from night till morn."

"Peter said it was for her man's mother that they called the bairn," said Laura.

"And right enough too," insisted the old woman.

"Aw, weel," sighed Laura, "it 's strange to think of Barbie in a great fine house with two-three servants, and ye and Terval" —

"Dona talk, woman," snapped the other, losing patience. "It 's the Lord's will. He set her on the path where she is now, and I doubt she 's doing her duty there as we try to do ours here. And if it be appointed that she is to come back to Setter . . . if not, we 'll just abide it. And you may tell the toon that, Lowra Manson."

All the while that she talked she had been making up the butter; and now, when she returned from setting it aside in a cool place, she found a stranger in the doorway.

"Good evening, mother. I 'm just in time for the buttermilk, I see. Can you give me a little and a scone or two? I 'm the new revenue inspector on my way to Lunda."

As the old woman hastened to prepare what he had asked for, Laura said, "Ye 'll no find much whiskey in these parts, surely?"

"They tell me there 's been none made or smuggled in for twenty years on the island. Still, we keep a sharp lookout, you know."

"Ay," she said, "but there 's none to drink it, ye ken. We 're all Rechabites here; and there 's only three bodies in the toon that takes it. And one of them is a traveling pedler from the Mainland who passes through now and then, and the other two is Scotchmen."

He laughed good-naturedly at the joke on his country, and added that they should be called the "Three Graces," or better yet, the "Three Disgraces."

"Not that whiskey is n't a very good thing," he concluded, "when the tax is paid. It 's a bonny medicine."

"Medicine?" repeated the old woman, pausing with a geranium that she was removing beyond the reach of the inspector's elbow. "Ay, I 've heard that said in my country. I 'm a Highland woman myself."

"Good enough," said the young fellow. "I must pay you extra for that. Will a sixpence do you, mother?"

"It 's nothing," she hesitated, fumbling at her apron. "I want no money."

"Come, then, we 'll make it two this time. It was the best buttermilk and scones I 've had since I 've come up here. Good day to you, and thanks. Yonder 's the road to Lunda, I believe?"

She looked after him with an expression half sly, half shamed.

"I should not have taken them," she said, with a sharp glance at Laura, "but he was so quick; and it 's not many a day I see the like of them."

"Is it no? But ye 're on the main road from Cullivoe to Lunda. I should think — If I took a thing of the sort, my man would bid me walk after the guest and give it back" —

She was interrupted by the crash of the empty bowl on the stones.

"I 'm not likely to make much out of this day," groaned the old woman, as she stooped and with trembling fingers began to gather up the pieces.

As Laura helped her, she observed, "It 's a pity ye have no daughter to do for ye, woman."

"A daughter?" was the angry retort. "I 'm got Terval — he 's son and daughter too. What more do I want?"

"Aw, weel," said the gossip, sending her last shot, "ye 'll maybe have Barbie soon. What I come up to tell ye both was that Peter was saying he didna think, for all her fine looks, she was just so happy altogether. His mother, ye ken, isna so pleasant a woman as might be, and I doubt she 's pinin' a wee."

CHAPTER IV

A BASKET OF GRASS

TERVAL might well have passed for a figure of the old god Thor, from whom his name was derived, as he strode off to the hills to wear his anger away. He had walked along the entire ridge encircling the voe before he came to himself; and then he perceived that he was looking down upon the kirk-yard, where Meggy-Betty was at work gathering up the new-mown grass. As he descended and stood a moment looking over the wall, she gave him a brief "That 's a fine day," and resumed her labors.

He hesitated and half turned on his heel, but finally entered and leaned against the broken wall of the old ruined kirk. For a while he watched in silence her short, square figure and muscular arms as she brought great loads of the grass and heaped them in her rope creel; then he said slowly, —

"Meggy-Betty, what cuts sharper than yon hook, and stings worse than yon bunch of nettles you 're saving so carefully for the kye next winter, and is more bitter than any of old Sweeti's herb-drinks? Tell me that."

Meggy-Betty colored as she sought out and tossed aside the nettles. Then she drew her hap close about her head and shoulders and gazed down the long voe seaward, while she reflected.

At last she shook her head. "If it 's a riddle, I never guessed one in my life, Terval."

"Well, did ye never try this: —

> "Four that hang and four that go,
> Two that look and two that crook,
> And one that follows behind?"

"I wouldna say but that might be a cow," she suggested very doubtfully.

"That 's no so bad," said he, with an approving wag of his great head. "Now try you mine."

"I 've no time for such-like nonsense," she reproved him, and stooped again to her grass.

"The better for you, then. But I 'll just tell you what I had in my mind: it was the tongue of a gossiping woman."

"Did ye get it all out of your own head, Terval?" she began admiringly, but stopped short and flushed. "I ken fine it 's Lowra that made ye think of it. Is she up at Framgord now?"

"Aw, well," he said, "we 'll maybe best say no more about it. She canna help the things she puts into my mind, more than yon heap of grass can help what it puts there."

As she came up with a fresh armful, he observed in a low, monotonous tone, like one thinking aloud, "It 's a curious thing, Meggy-Betty, and one hard to be believed, that next winter ye 'll surely be eating the blacksmith's father-in-law."

In her alarm she forgot to hold the grass, which a sudden whoop of the wind carried to all parts of the kirkyard.

He smiled at her amazement, but only pushed his rough cap back from his forehead and awaited her comment.

Presently it was her turn to chuckle, — Meggy-Betty's laugh was like the murmur of a quiet, smooth-bedded brook, — and she said, "Ye 're wanting me to ask, but I 'll no ask. You can tell me, if you like."

"I 'll maybe frighten you?"

"Maybe. You must take the chance of that. Terval, sometimes I think you 're a changeling brought by the trows from the far hills, ye 're that different from other folk."

"Aw, well, it 's no matter. But about the blacksmith's father-in-law — there 's no fairy thing in that. It 's just plain chemistry."

At her blank look he began again: "He 's buried here at our feet, is he no? And his body has gone into the grass that ye 're kneeling on now" — she

rose precipitately — "that ye 'll give to the kye in winter and get back by way of milk — see you that?"

She was speechless.

"And when we die we 'll be done the same to by other folk, and so on to the end of the world — see you that?"

Meggy-Betty, slowly pulling together the ropes that bound her creel, asked in an awed voice, "How do you know such things, Terval?"

"It 's just chemistry, as I said before. I 'm been reading some books about it lately. It 's a pity you 've no knawledge of that subject, Meggy-Betty. But I 'll try to explain. Ye ken very well that if ye were to try to dig him up now, he wouldna be found. For twenty year the grasses and flowers has grown on his grave. Now where has his body gone if not into them? It 's as plain as my cap." At this he lifted his shapeless headgear and swung it on his hand, while the sea-breeze ruffled his long hair.

"It sounds fearsome," said Meggy-Betty under her breath, "but as you put it, Terval, it sounds true."

"It is true," he asserted, "only, no doubt, he was all turned into fodder long ago."

She sighed with relief. "Then we needna be

thinking about next winter. Whatever puts such wonderful thoughts into your head, Terval?"

"Aw, that I dona ken," he answered, with modest pride.

A sudden thought started her eyes wide open. "But what about the resurrection of the body?"

"Aw, well, ye have that — in a way, in the grass and flowers" —

"And in the cow," she finished for him, with a laugh, "no to speak o' the milk. But the soul, now — does that go into the cow at all?"

He laughed with her; it had occurred to him that she looked as if by some mistake the soul of a cow had gone into her. But he answered serenely, "I 'm got too much to do about the croft to bother about my soul."

"So!" she observed dryly. "That 's why ye never come to the kirk."

"It 's maybe one reason," he admitted, as he helped her to lift on her back the heavy burden of grass that almost extinguished her.

"I must be getting home," she said; "dad will be fair out of temper wi' me for biding so long."

"That minds me," he began, as they descended the slope together, and he turned his cap over in his hands as if in embarrassment, "of the special

thing I came in to say to you. You 'll maybe be angry wi' me — I canna help it — but, Meggy-Betty, as long as you do Lowra's work she 'll be running about the toon with her gossip and slander."

As she said nothing, he asked anxiously, "Ye 're angry wi' me?"

"Na, na," was her quick response, "a body canna well be angry wi' you, Terval. But what should I do about it?"

He stepped forward and looked at her shrewdly — at the hollows under her high cheek-bones, at the lines about her dull, honest gray eyes, on her high forehead, and about the full, kindly mouth. She was getting on in years — he knew to a day the exact age of every person in the toon — thirty-nine in June, that would be it.

"Meggy-Betty," he said abruptly, "you ought to have a husband."

He was looking up the road now, and did not see the change in her face. When her continued silence caused him to turn, she was showing her big white teeth in a broad smile.

"Terval, you 're ay looking after everybody but yourself."

But he treated the matter seriously. "You should have a but-and-ben of your own."

She hardly knew how to take this.

"If I kenned a good man that needed a wife," he continued thoughtfully, "I would see that he made it up with you. Now I myself" — a sort of shiver seemed to permeate the great bundle of grass, but perhaps it was caused by a gust of wind — "I myself manage very well with my mother; but we have our own land. If your father could get a croft for the two of you" —

"There's none to be had," she answered, in a voice not quite steady; "and if there was, we couldna pay for it. It's Magnie that puts the porridge into our mouths."

"And Lowra that takes pay of you for it," he insisted, with some severity. "Have ye spoke to Magnie about it?"

"That have I not. What for should I be making trouble between him and his wife, when he thinks she's the finest woman on the island? Na, na."

"You need somebody to take care of you," he pursued doggedly.

Then Meggy-Betty's pent-up feelings broke out into a sort of laughing vehemence. "No half so much as yourself, Terval! From the very night that your father was brought home and couldna lift a finger for himself up to this day to-day, when

you 're past the middle of your life, there 's been never a body to see that ye had any of the things ye wanted in the world! "

His protesting hand was unheeded. " What of that, then? " he said. " I 'm had enough."

" Enough? " she asked, with a kind of scorn. " What call ye enough? To take upon you all the work of the croft and let Eric go whaling " —

" But that was fifteen year ago," he explained.

" Ay, and for fifteen year you have helped Osla to bring up his children " —

" Na, na," — he was intensely earnest now, — " that was all Osla's doing. She was welcome to what we had, but she took nothing, as ye ken very well. She 's the proudest woman in Setter — is Osla! "

She did not deny this, but pursued him relentlessly: " Aw, well, and when Barbie took up with the fishing-tenant from London, ye jest let her have him and go away to the South, when she should have bided at home with her mother " —

" That 's ten year since," he interrupted.

" It might be to-morrow," she insisted, " and you would do the same."

He could not deny this, but said only, " Such matters are not in our hands. And mam and I do very well together."

"But if you had your way, Terval" —

"I shall have my way yet," he said smiling. "I 'm no so old and crippled but that the time will come. I can wait."

"And then you 'll go out and see the strange places in the world," she added, with a touch of wistfulness.

"I 'm no caring so much about the strange places," said he. "I can read all about those in books. But I would like fine to see the Mother Country. Ye may laugh at this for a queer notion, Meggy-Betty, — I canna remember that ever I told it to any one else before, — but I have a fancy that all the things I have missed in my life I shall find when I go to Norway." He smiled at his own foolishness.

But she was more serious than he. "Do ye never long for the day to come, Terval?"

"Every man has his dreams, I doubt," he began quietly. Then suddenly the sea-blue eyes blazed, so that she looked away from them to the dusty road.

"Ay, ay, it 's in our blood to wander about the world," he said, still quietly, but in a voice that thrilled now and then with swift gusts of feeling. "My father had it, and his father, and all the generations of us as far back as we know. And

beyond that, Meggy-Betty, we were Wickings, I doubt, back to the time of Odin."

Her face was a little puzzled, but sympathetic, and he continued musingly, "It seems as if it 's the cry of the sea in our hearts — as you can hear it whiles going on in some shells — and it 's there while we live; and if we listen to it, we follow. So my father heard it, and even after, when he lay crippled with rheumatic fever after that night off Gloup, sometimes it was so strong upon him that I thought he would be dragged out of his bed by it. And Eric again" —

"Have you heard it all your life, Terval?"

He did not answer directly. "I canna say what it is, but it pulls against duty and friendship and love. And even if a man fights it all his life, I canna say but that at the very end it might sweep over him like a madness and destroy all he 's been building. Ye 'll maybe no ken what I mean?"

"I ken a little," she said, "a peerie bit. But it was surely Eric's place to be the head of the house when your father died; and it was God's judgment upon him when he went to the whaling and never came home."

"Then God's judgment showed a lack of logic," he said smiling. "It would have been a worse judgment to have kept him still at home."

"I dona ken what 's *logic*," she admitted, "but the best years of your life is gone, and if ye had been free to study and to do as ye liked, ye might have been anything; ye might have been a — a postmaster."

This was a supreme effort of imagination in Meggy-Betty, and she fell silent.

"Aw, well," said Terval gently, "maybe I 'll be getting my chance yet. But, however, there 's no many a bonnier place in the world, I doubt, than this same corner of Snarravoe. But ye seem to have forgotten that it was yourself we were speaking of."

"Myself?" she repeated. "Aw, but I 'm a woman, ye ken, and it was just my plain duty to stay with dad. I doubt it 's all for the best."

"Ay, ay," he agreed, "and will be, even if your body is raised up according to the Scripture, and mine goes into a cow or a score of lambs."

"Na, na," she insisted, "with all your wheer ways, it will be just the same place we 'll be going to in the end."

By this time they had reached the by-road that climbs the hill to Crussafield, and so they parted.

"I 'm thinking," said Terval, "that I 'd better have been getting in my hay instead of talking nonsense to thee."

"Maybe so," said Meggy-Betty, "but I'm no so sure it's all nonsense, Terval. Some folks says that just talking of a thing and thinking of it helps to bring it true. Ye may get your chance soon."

"Aw, well, I'll just take it then."

"I wonder," says Meggy-Betty, looking at him thoughtfully.

CHAPTER V

THE CASTING OF THE HEART

SHORTLY after the St. Sunniva had brought Peter Wilson back from London, Osla Saemundson, Eric's widow, was shearing the grass along the drains between her strips of oats and potatoes. To be sure there was not very much to be had for a whole day's labor; but the little she got was saved.

Osla was one of the few Setter folk who did not go down to the landing; she was content to hear the news from her daughter Nenie, who found the hour of the steamer's coming convenient for taking to the shop a shawl that she and her mother had just finished knitting.

But after all, Nenie was not first with the news. Osla was kneeling and shearing fast, having given the necessary glance to assure herself that Charlie Polson's sheep was not drowned and that the arrival was Peter Wilson, when Laura Manson called up to her from the road below. At first, indeed, she gave but scant attention, though she heard enough to make her brown cheeks glow red; but

presently she drew herself up to her full height — and she is the tallest woman in the parish — and after a few moments' pretense at fumbling with the red scarf that she wore always in defiance of her widowhood, and picking bits of grass from her hook, she flashed out with an eye before which the other woman quailed, "Get you home for a scandal-monging body, Lowra Manson! I doubt the devil feeds his fires with such-like as you!"

For any other woman Laura would have had a retort; but as it was she only grumbled: "You 've a tongue like a stinging nettle, Osla. And this is my thanks for bringing you word of your own husband's sister."

But Osla had already turned her back and begun to shear again, higher up in the field.

When Nenie came home she had still the shawl, saying that Mester Clark could not buy any more at present.

"Aw, well," said Osla patiently, "we must just lay it aside a while. Will he take any haps?"

"Yea, two or three."

"Where 's our letter?"

"What letter?" asked the tease.

"As if you didna ken — Wullie's. It 's up your sleeve — out with it."

"It might be lost," suggested Nenie naughtily.

"But it isna; I ken well enough. If it had been I should have kenned."

With a satisfied smile she cut the envelope, and Nenie craned her neck to read over her mother's shoulder.

First of all, there fell out a postal order.

"Ten shillings!" cried Osla triumphant. "It 's more as the shawl would have brought. He 's the best lad in the world."

A dissenting murmur reached her ear, and she pounced quickly: "You 're thinking, maybe, of Charlie Moar?"

Thus hard pressed, Nenie retorted hastily in self-defense: "Joan Robertson was telling me at the shop that wee Lizzie 's lost her stomach; and Jimmy says he will call in the doctor when he comes home from Fetlar."

"Doctor?" sniffed Osla, fairly trapped, as Nenie had intended. "The doctor 's all very well; but there 's some things has to be treated in a different way altogether."

"But Joan is fair at her wits' end what to do wi' the bairn."

"What to do? I 'll show her — what my mother did for me when I was a sickly bairn, and her mother's mother afore her."

They had walked up to the house together, and

at the door Osla turned and looked across the dale to Halsagarth, where Jimmy Robertson lived. A faint color showed in her face as she asked, "Where 's Jimmy now?"

"He was gone out to try for a bit o' cod, Joan said."

"Aw, well," said Osla, "we 'll just have our tea and then I 'll go over and see what can be done."

So it happened that Joan Robertson, nursing her puny little sister by the fire, looked up with a glad smile to welcome the tall, gaunt neighbor who stood in the doorway.

"How 's the wee bairnie, the day?" asked Osla, bending over to study the child's face.

"I canna make her eat anything," said Joan, in a troubled voice.

"So," answered Osla, drawing up a chair and beginning to knit the border of a hap while she talked.

When Joan had finished her account of the symptoms, Osla rubbed a knitting-needle against her cheek, looking very wise.

"Joan, lass," she said, "before the doctor comes back, or your father, shall we no take her to a woman I ken?"

"Who, then?" asked Joan, wondering.

"A woman that knows all about such things — just old Sweeti."

"Sweeti?" repeated Joan, amazed.

"Ay, ay, your mother would have kenned fine what I mean. The lassie looks to me like she 's hurted from the ground."

"By the trows, you mean? There 's no such thing as fairies."

"Hsh, my lass, maybe no. But old Sweeti has lived fourscore year more as you, and she kens many things that 's hid from the young."

"But dad was speaking of the doctor," protested the girl.

Osla's scorn grew high. "The doctor 's just a darling, but what does he know about casting the heart and such-like remedies? Besides, Sweeti in her young days was in service with a doctor for more as twenty year; and when she left him she kenned as much about it as he did, and folk would come to her from all parts of the island. Na, na, we 'll take the old woman a grain o' tea" —

"Our own tea, then," says Joan, spying a parcel tucked into Osla's belt. And she would not stir until she had her way.

"Your pride will bring you woe some day, my lass," said Osla, taking the bairnie into her arms.

"Think you?" asked Joan, flushing a little, and

hastily changed the subject. "Yon 's father fishing in the voe. He thought maybe Lizzie would try a bit o' young cod or a piltock."

"Yon?" was the most Osla could do in the way of dissembling that she already knew the fact.

They said no more then, for Sweeti lived high on the hill, outside the turf dykes that enclosed the toon; and while Osla, even with her burden, walked as lightly as a deer over the heather and breathed almost as deeply and serenely as on a level road, Joan panted with the steepness of the climb and the constant overleaping of mossy bogs.

Sweeti was standing in the door of her tiny turf cottage, built by the parish, shading her eyes to make out the familiar faces of the women as they advanced towards the pale yellow sunset. She invited them into her dingy room with a welcome not unaffected by a glimpse of the parcels of tea and sugar that Joan was carrying.

She waited for them to tell their errand in their own way, and since she insisted upon their taking the only two chairs in the room, herself sat huddled on the edge of her stone hearth, looking scarcely bigger than a ten-year-old child. In the glow of the peats her hair shone golden yellow, and her eyes were as bright as a hawk's; and now and again, as the flame rose and sank, softening a line here and

rounding out a curve there, one might see in her withered, mouthing face the wreckage of a great beauty. She sucked in the symptoms as if they had been peppermints, and when the story was done, became silent and mysterious of look.

They waited patiently until she thought it the proper time to mutter, "It 's new moon, the week."

"So it will be," said Osla eagerly.

"And the tide 's comin' in just now."

"That it is."

"And it 's close upon sunset."

"So!"

"We 'll try what we can do."

There followed, in a dark corner of the room, various preparations unseen by the votaries; but in due time Osla was instructed to hold an open pair of scissors over a bowl of water set in a sieve on the head of the little patient, whom Joan meanwhile steadied in a large iron kettle before the hearth. Sweeti herself poured melted lead through the scissors into the water, and when among the bits of hardened metal one was found moulded like a tiny heart, the old woman pronounced the cure a success.

Joan listened in a dazed way to the directions: to sew the heart into the little maid's smock over the left breast and to take home the bowl of water

and make it up into porridge on the morrow, and let the lassie eat this sitting in the doorway at sunset; but she was more intent upon soothing wee Lizzie, now sobbing softly with reminiscent fright over the strange proceedings.

"Well, well," muttered the crone, "it 's many a year since I have cast a heart for you, Osla."

"It were Wullie's. Nenie had never a bad day in her life."

"How 's Wullie now?"

"He 's getting on fine — a cooper at Petershead — and sends me money always by the steamer."

"Nenie 'll be looking to have a lad of her own soon?"

"I canna say."

"I 'm heard there 's a lad who talks of going South, to Aberdeen, it will be" —

"It 's Charlie Moar, ye mean? But I dona ken if she likes him."

"That will be a lonely day for you, Osla, if she goes South to live." Osla made no answer. "Pray God it be not with her as with Barbie Saemundson. I doubt there 's many a day she 's cursed the hour she left Shetland, for all her husband 's a fine gentleman. I tell ye, Osla, the North and the South canna live together."

Here, somewhat to the surprise of both women,

Joan broke in, her thin, plaintive voice sounding rather sharp, "But Mester Holmes is an Englishman; it 's no the same with Scotchmen at all."

"But we werena speakin' o' Scotchmen at all," said Osla; and Joan hung her head, abashed before Sweeti's sharp glance.

"We 'm no heard the last of Barbie yet," continued Sweeti in a prophetic tone. "I was on the shore of the Birrier Loch, the first time ever they met, and as soon as I saw him at his fishing, stepping along so careful like from stone to stone, as if he was afraid of wetting his — that leather things the gentry wears" —

"Waders?" suggested Joan.

"So it will be. Well, as soon as he met Barbie in her petticoat, with her dress about her hips, and her boots swinging across her shoulders, as she come laughing and splashing through the pools, and when I saw how they was both forgetting to hold their rods for looking at each other, I say to myself, 'It will be the mixing of fire and water if they two should make it up.' And so it were. Nobody told me, but I ken. And mark me, there 'll be a day when she 'll come home again."

"What likena man was Mester Holmes?" asked Joan. "I canna mind."

"A pretty man," said Osla quickly; "slim and

straight, and pleasant-spoken as might be. Do ye no mind, he had no beard like our men?"

"Ay," says Joan. "I remember now."

"But Barbie," mused Sweeti, "with her hair shining about her face, and the sun glintin' in her eyes — Barbie were just a jewel. Osla, ye 'll be lonely enough, if you let your lassie go South."

"I have my work to do," said Osla curtly.

"But that 's no the same as husband and bairns, woman. I ken — I ken fine."

The beautiful lines were clear on the old face now. Husband Sweeti had never known; but she had had three bairns, — two sons drowned at sea and a daughter vanished, years before, in the slums of Edinburgh.

"But ye 'll be marrying again some day, surely?"

"Na," said Osla, moving uneasily and flushing, "I 'll just wait till my man comes home."

"Eric?" The old woman laughed harshly. "He 'm been dead this fifteen year, woman. Drooned — like mine — like mine! Dead men dona come back from the sea. Who should ken that but myself?"

She rocked back and forth with a crooning sound that presently broke forth into a shrill, "What likena man was yours that ye should wait for him all your days?"

"When we was bairns at school together," said Osla, in a low voice, "I hated him — he were that masterful. And when he was seekin' me afterwards I made it hard enough for him. But when once he had his way with me — na!" She got to her feet and stood very stiff and straight. "If he 's dead, I 'll just bide his widow. But he 's no dead at all — he so young and strong" —

"Less," clicked the old woman, "it 's the young and strong that the sea loves!"

There was a silence, but at length Osla said, "There 's strange things happens at sea. Come, Joan, we 'll go now. I 'll carry the bairnie — so."

The child cuddled to her gladly, seeing which old Sweeti chuckled in her doorway, and pulling Joan back a moment, whispered hoarsely, "Lass, you might go far and find a worse stepmother."

But Joan broke away and ran after Osla, who, when she drew near, was singing, scarcely above a whisper: —

"Hushyba, my curry ting,
Cuddle close to mammy;
Cuddle close and hear me sing,
Peerie, mootie lammie."

"They 'll be putting out the nets now at the fishin'," she said, as Joan came to her side. "Lis-

ten, how it tells of the twilight — just as we 're lookin' at it this minute : —

> "Saftly, saftly hümin gray
> Owre da sea is creepin',
> And it 's nidder nicht nor day,
> Wakin' time, nor sleepin'."

"There 's a light at home," murmured Joan. "Father must have come in."

CHAPTER VI

A PERILOUS WOOING

ALMOST as soon as Osla had crossed the threshold of Joan's kitchen, the Norns began to spin the threads of her little daughter's destiny. Andreina washed and put away the tea-cups with a trip almost as gay as a Shetland reel. Then she removed the crimping-pins from her fluffy, straw-colored hair, took off her apron, tied a flowered ribbon about the neck of her pink blouse, and, knitting in hand, went to lean against the kitchen door and look at — the weather.

Although the sunset was then an increasing glory of rainbow hues spread over half the sky, the girl presently became so absorbed in a search for a dropped stitch that she failed to see young Charlie Moar strolling up the road, and also manifesting great interest in — the weather.

They were accordingly much surprised to see each other ; and Charlie, sauntering up the flagged walk with an air of mingled indifference and hesitation, asked with some huskiness of the throat, "Is your mother at home, Nenie?"

"Na," answered the girl, still puckering her lips over the stitch; "did you want to see her?"

"Na, na; I just thought" — Ideas failed him, and he gazed vaguely across the voe, where a window sparkled in the sun's rays like a diamond. "We had a good catch," he began again.

"So I'm heard. Spent fish?" she asked naughtily.

"Na!" he growled, with sudden heat. "As fine fish as ever went to the market — forty cran. We got sixteen shillings the barrel for them."

"Ah!" said she, "the Bella had sixty-two cran, they say."

The little wooden gate creaked beneath the weight of his hand, and Nenie, with an eye to its safety, changed the subject. "It's a fine night," she observed critically.

"It is that." His tone showed the relief of one who, after several vain attempts, has just caught a life-rope. "A fine night for a walk," he suggested.

"That might be." Her tone showed no interest in the matter.

"Will you — no — no come?" he stammered.

"Come where?"

"T—t—to—to—take a walk with—with me?"

Her eyes were coldly critical. "I hadna thought about such a thing. Where should we walk to?"

He sought help from the landscape; and at last

his eye rested upon the gleam of a little loch to the southward. "We might go to the Birrier," he said, and his eyes fell before the laugh in hers.

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask how many times a day he supposed she went there, seeking the cow or the lambs; but she forbore, and said quietly, after a moment's reflection, that she would put on her hat.

"Aw — just come in your hap," he pleaded, for under her white tower of feathers and roses she was infinitely more alarming. It removed her such an immeasurable distance from a blue-clad fisherman, even when he wore an azure silk tie.

"What 's a hat for," she began severely, "if it 's no to wear to" — and here she could not control the giggle — "to the Birrier?"

"Do you think the kittiwakes and the whaups will look at it?" he asked, with his sea-browned face more flushed than usual. "I say I like you best in the hap. Come!"

In the familiar voice there was a new tone that she rather admired. She followed meekly, not even stopping to lay aside her sock.

They climbed the hill and crossed the excoriated surface of the great brown moors; and as they leaped from bank to bank, rounded pools and swung across burns, all without a word spoken, the embarrassment

of the silence became so keen that the girl began to hum under her breath, to the click of her needles.

Perhaps the slight sound gave him courage. "Nenie, I 'm thinkin' of givin' up the fishin'."

No answer.

"Weel?"

"Weel?"

"What do you say?"

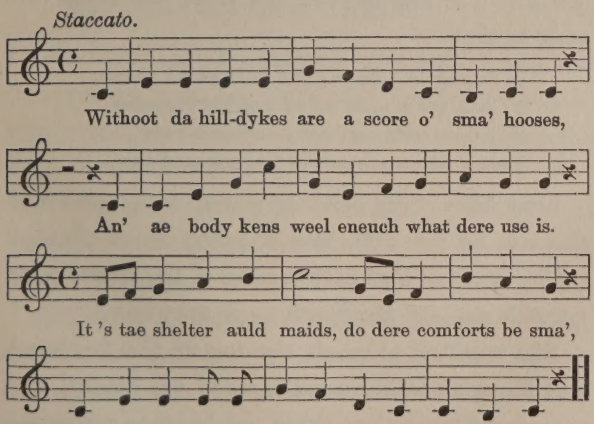
"I? Nothing."

"But surely" —

"You 'll do as you like, for all my sayin'."

"But" —

She looked away from him to the sea; and her humming became presently the words of an old song that she had heard her mother sing: —


Staccato.
Withoot da hill-dykes are a score o' sma' hooses,
An' ae body kens weel eneuch what dere use is.
It 's tae shelter auld maids, do dere comforts be sma',
Since a' wir bonnie laddies frae wis gaed a - wa'.

"Do you mean that, Nenie?" he interrupted eagerly.

"Mean what?" she asked, in all seeming innocence; and without giving him any opportunity to reply, continued: —

> Oh, shame fa' da laird, for he 's surely to blame
> For no keepin' mair a' wir laddies at hame.
> If da herrin' would bide and da whales dey would ca',
> Den a' wir bonnie laddies would no geng awa'.

"Indeed, and that 's true, Nenie. But it 's no for myself that I 'm wanting more money."

"Cut-a-cut-a-cut-a-cut-a-cut," she clicked. "I believe yon 's our black ewe that was lost."

"Nenie" —

But as they climbed the great headland jutting out into the sea beyond the loch, she broke into song again: —

> In da kirk on a Sunday and in da school classes,
> Da seats are a' filled up wi' naethin' bit lasses;
> No a bare curly head can ye scarce see ava',
> Since a' wir bonnie laddies frae wis gaed awa'.

One bare curly head appeared with some suddenness by her side, and a husky voice pleaded, "I 'm thinkin' that maybe some o' the lassies could go with us — to the South — if they liked."

She was first to reach the top of the headland, and though panting a little, stood up boldly, with the wind flapping her skirts and blowing across her

face a few strands of light hair that gleamed below her hap; and there she sang clearly and sweetly:

On a Saturday nicht no a lad on da lum —

"Will ye no be serious, lass?"

"I am serious." She sang plaintively: —

No a turf-clod flung in for to say dat he 's come.

With a frown of impatience he turned on his heel.

But we luik and we listen an' nane 's laek tae fa'.

The voice now had a pathetic ring that caused him to look back; but the face wore a mocking smile that angered him into striding on for several yards without stopping.

Since a' wir bonnie laddies frae wis —

Was that a sob? Once more he turned, and this time rushed upon her; but she fled before him as a ship in a fair wind, straight out upon the point that stretched into the sea.

He made a trumpet of his hands. "Nenie!" he bellowed, — she must have heard, — "Nenie! Come back. It 's no safe!"

Suddenly he stopped running. It was hopeless to overtake her, and if she saw that the pursuit was given over she would soon cease her flight. But unfortunately she did not turn, and the fisher-

man's brow creased with anxiety. She was drawing near a place where the point narrowed to a single arch where the sea had cut for itself a channel through the rock. This, as he knew — as she should have known, had she stopped to think — had lately been condemned as unsafe. It was cracked and rotten, ready to fall at any unusual weight, and to turn the promontory into an isolated stack.

He shouted again and again, running still, but without hope of overtaking her. Once only did she give a flying backward glance, not long enough to see or heed his frantic gestures. There was one moment when he was blind with fear for her; the next he beheld her sitting on the ground within a little circle of stones, just beyond the arch.

Then he gave over running, and tramped grimly down to the edge of the dangerous place.

"Shall I come over?" he asked, with a steady look.

She smiled tantalizingly, but made no answer; and without the slightest hesitation he walked across and stood looking down upon her.

"Now," he began, and stopped short, for with a slow creak and rumble, a great wedge of earth, nearly half the breadth of the arch, broke loose and splashed into the sea, two hundred feet below.

Nenie crushed her hands together with a sharp little cry.

"Did you no ken?" he asked.

"I forgot," she whispered. "What can we do?"

"Just bide here till they look for us."

She cast a quick glance about her: on three sides the darkening sea, on the fourth the crumbling arch. There was no help in the far islands, in the giant cliffs of Fetlar, in the dark blotches of Linga, of Grüney, of Uyea; nor in the twinkling light on the Skerries. The cold wind made her shiver. She drew a little way from Charlie, and peered over one black wall of cliff.

"Shall I try to climb down or dive?" asked the lad scornfully. "I 'll do whichever you say."

"You 'll no dive and you 'll no climb." But the sentence ended in a sob of "O Charlie!"

This rather unmanned him; but he steeled his heart and said coolly, "I dona think they will find us, the night."

"I canna bide," she gasped. "Mother" —

He considered the situation for a while in silence, — the wind was growing stronger and colder; there was no shelter more than a foot high.

"Nenie," said he at last, struck with an idea, "what will you say to me if I bring you safe home to-night?"

She hushed her crying to listen.

"Ye ken I 've been seekin' ye ever since you was a peerie lassie. I never once thought of any other sweetheart, though you 've always been over-sparing of kind words to me. But that makes no difference at all. I couldna speak till I knew I could give you a but-and-ben; and so — I 'm going to leave the fishing. It 's a fine chance I 'm got in Aberdeen, — steady work and good pay. I could come back and fetch you in the spring. Does you hear, lass?"

"Yea, I hear." She had muffled her face in her hap.

"What say you?"

"I want to — go home."

"And if I bring you home?"

"I 'll bide there — I canna leave mother."

"Is that all?"

"It 's enough. She 's nobody but me, now that Wullie 's gone."

"Is that all, I say, or — is there another lad?"

She was silent.

"Is it Davie Clark?" he asked, in a sudden flame of anxiety.

"Maybe no," began the tease slyly; then suddenly remembering the situation, she clutched his arm, crying, "You said you would find a way, Charlie!"

"So I will," was the prompt answer. "I 'm only waiting to see whether you 'll listen if" —

"What?"

"Will you have me, then?"

"Na, I canna leave mother, I tell you."

"But if I talk her over?"

"Na!"

"She might come with us?"

"She wouldna."

He knew well enough that this was true; but he also knew that Osla would give up her daughter without a quiver of the eyelid for the sake of Nenie's happiness. Still, for the time, this obstinacy baffled him.

"Na," she continued, "I 'll no promise anything. You 've no right to make me just because — just because — it 's cowardly."

She walked away from him in the dusk. For a moment he looked steadily at the narrow strip of land that barred them from safety; the swish of the sea fell upon unheeding ears. Then he began to measure the length of the arch; eight — nine — ten — it was scarcely more than ten feet perhaps. Of course, there was no telling how far it was weakened now. If he jumped and fell a bit short, still it was a chance, and chances were usually worth taking.

He ran past Nenie towards the end of the headland, and made a sudden trial leap. Good! Then he came up to her again; her back was turned and she had not seen his little manœuvre.

"You 've taunted me enough," he said doggedly. "You shallna call me coward twice. I 'm goin' for help, and you must just bide here until it comes. Dona try to cross by yourself — it 's most dizzifyin' now. Bide here till somebody comes."

"But, Charlie" —

"Promise me you 'll bide."

"But what will you do?"

"Jump."

"Na." She came close, but he put her aside.

"You might fall!"

"I 'll no fall."

He jerked himself away from the arms held out to stop him, and drew back for his run.

"Bide with me!" she cried; but it was to deaf ears.

Then she stumbled forward and fell on her knees to clutch him as he passed; but she was too late. He only swerved a little and leaped, not where the arch itself was, but over the chasm where the waves swished and ebbed over the shale in the blackness below. He barely cleared the gorge, falling on hands and knees, with one leg dangling over the cliff.

Before he could brush the earth from his fingers, before he could crawl into full safety even, he was aware that she was kneeling by his side, having sped across the arch with no thought of the peril. And as he looked at her, dazed and unable to speak, one clod, then another and another, detached by her footfall, broke away, until the whole path sank slowly and crashed with a rumble and heavy splashes into the water below. The headland had become a stack.

At last, "Your promise," muttered the lad, as he got to his feet and began to brush his knees.

"I made none," she whispered, with her eyes hidden from the terror of the fall.

He tried to look into her face, but even when he had removed her hands, it was indistinct in the twilight; yet he was quite sure that she had spoken his name and waited.

"I'm sorry — I was near punished — for it — but girls canna help it, you ken — they 'm such fools — when — when — they are — are" —

"What?" he asked, and ventured to put his arm around her.

"In love," she whispered.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHADOW OF THE ABSENT

On the Sunday following the fall of the rock at the Birrier, Jimmy Robertson, on his way from the kirk, reached a momentous decision. It was too big to be told in words at first, and he sat brooding over it all the afternoon, and not until wee Lizzie had been put to bed did he venture to give Joan any inkling of what had been spinning itself out in his mind, the while that she thought him asleep.

She came and sat by his side at the fire, having in her hands a book that she did not open.

When he was sure that she did not intend to read he observed, "Is you no wanting to go anywhere?"

She shook her head, with eyes a little more sombre than usual.

"Joan, I 'm thinking it 's been very hard for you these last years."

She stopped him with a piteous look and a quick, "I doubt I 'm no doing it over-well."

"You 's doin' it right enough, my lass. No fear

o' you! But" — He smoked for a while, wondering how to get on with the matter. Joan unconsciously helped him.

"If it wasna for Osla I couldna have done it," she continued; and was half minded to tell him what had passed at Sweeti's.

"She 's a good woman," he assented, with feigned indifference, and an alert eye to see how she would take this praise from him.

"She 's taught me the most I know about the kye and the lambs and — aye, she 's a good woman!" Then, seemingly fearful of the effect of her own words, she quickly changed the subject. "Father, I think wee Lizzie 's a peerie bit better."

"She took her porridge, the day."

"She did so, and Sweeti said" — She had told it now.

"Sweeti? What has Sweeti to do with it?"

"The night you went to get her some cod, we — we took her to Sweeti," she faltered.

"I have no faith in Sweeti," he announced solemnly.

"Na, na, but Lizzie 's better. It doesna matter that ye have no faith."

"We should have called the doctor," he said again.

There was a touch of slyness in Joan's next

remark. "It was Osla who wouldna hear of the doctor, and she who took Lizzie to the old woman."

"Aw — well" — He pulled himself up so sharply that Joan smiled to herself.

"She 's a woman that kens a deal about bairns," he said, after a while.

"Sweeti told her she ought to marry again," continued Joan.

"What? Aye, so she ought, so she ought!" he put in eagerly. "And what said she to that?"

Joan shook her head. "No much."

"Hm — m."

"Do you think her man is dead, father?" pursued the girl.

"Aye, beyond a doubt; it 's full fifteen year since he went whaling."

"And was never anything heard of him?"

"Never a word. Do you no mind when you was a peerie lass how Eric would set you on his shoulder and say he was your pony?"

"I seem to mind him," said Joan. "Was he no like Terval?"

"Aye, but bigger and bonnier. There wasna a pleasanter man in the whole island than Eric — when he had his will."

"And when he hadna?"

"Then — but I canna mind the time when he

didna have it. There was only one man in the island that could stop him."

"And was that Terval?"

"It was so. But he wouldna often do it. He was aye sayin', in those days, that every man must take his chance if he could get it. And so, when Eric had his, Terval wouldna stand in his way."

"Tell me about it," said Joan, who loved stories.

"Well, it was this way. When their father died the two lads had the croft together, and what with farming and fishing, they were as prosperous as any folk in the toon. Then Eric married Osla — though many a lad was seekin' her — many a one."

He seemed for a moment to forget his story, and Joan watched him keenly until he resumed: —

"But for all that he had her, he wasna long content; it seemed like he couldna bide in the one place. Every year in the spring — and it was five that he lived at home after he was married — it seemed like the sea was pulling at him with cables. I dona ken what Terval and Osla said to him; but each year when the summer was come Osla looked like an old woman; and when it was harvest again she had the face of a new-made bride. But one spring he went to Lerwick to sell

some ponies. I mind when he came back Terval and I was standin' side by side on the pier; and afore he landed he cried out from the flit-boat, 'I 'm got a chance to go whaling!'

"I looked at Terval; but his face was like he hadna heard — he was just starin' at the gulls on the water. And when we was all three walking up the road together Eric turned to him and said, What say you, Terval? Shall I go?'

"Then Terval asked in his slow way, 'Did you agree to go?' I mind weel how the two o' them looked at each other sidewise, and I turned from the one to the other and wondered which would have his way. If it had been a matter for blows, I couldna have said surely — both was that big and stout men. But as things stood I was o' the mind that Terval might have had his will. Eric's nose were beaked like a hawk, and his eyes was sharper and more close-set-like, and whiles they had a fearsome spark in them, and when he pushed out his lower lip against the upper — as he did then — I kenned weel that he had made up his mind; but Terval's face were more hard-set as the cliffs o' Fetlar, and a West Indies' hurricane wouldna have moved him unless he had pleased.

"Then Eric began pleasant enough how he would like fine to be comin' home wi' a pocket full

o' siller for the bairns. He was talking against the right and I kenned it, and I could see that Terval kenned it: it was only the sea tugging at his heart, as it has tugged at many a man's heart afore." Here the speaker sighed and shifted the fire.

"And soon Eric was sayin' good-by to us all, and when I asked Terval why he hadna set his face against it, he said, 'It was just eating his heart out — I ken.' Then Eric sailed for Greenland, and was never heard of — man nor ship."

Robertson sighed again and moved uneasily in his chair, finally got up and looked for his hat. "I 'm going to feed the lambs," he announced.

At the door he turned back with the abrupt query, "What would you say, lass, till a stepmother?"

The girl started and frowned with surprise, then said, with a faint smile, "I dona like the word, father; but — but I 'm over fond of Osla. Go your ways!"

Robertson had chosen his time wisely. It was scarcely dusk, though long after church, being an unusually clear twilight for August, and he found Osla alone, with the lamp lighted and her large Bible open on her knee.

"That 's a fine evening," said he, coming in

slowly that she might have time to put her spectacles away. Keen-eyed Osla, whose pride it was to count the sheep grazing on Hevdigarth across the voe, or to walk along the road and point out her own beasts halfway up the Vord Hill, was never much pleased when folk found her using her spectacles to read. She brought another chair to the fire — for the stuffed armchair facing her on the hearth had been Eric's and was never offered or taken — and looked expectant of news.

"Well, Osla," began Jimmy, "if the laird extends his sheep-farm down upon the point here" —

"We 'll just have to flit," she answered cheerfully.

"Where 'll you go?"

"I canna say," she began a trifle sadly, but plucked up spirit to add, "The time 's no come yet."

"And that 's true," he admitted. "You could always go to Framgord — eh?"

She shook her head, with heightened color, and pulled at her red scarf. "If Terval or mam needed me, I would go," she said; "but now it 's better for all that I should be in my own home. Besides, when my man comes back" —

But Jimmy was anxious to steer away from this topic, and said quickly, "Well, there 's two of you to manage the work" —

"But like to be one soon," she interrupted; and bit her tongue in vexation at the slip.

"What 's that you 're sayin'?"

She heaped needless peats upon the fire, having no answer ready; but he had heard well enough, and asked only to gain time.

"You mean that Nenie 'll be having a but-and-ben o' her own soon?"

"She says she 'll no leave her mother," was Osla's reply.

"But what says her mother?"

Osla looked at him with bright eyes that hid unshed tears, and answered, "Just that the young must be the young; and when Charlie Moar speaks the word, she 's bidden to go South with him."

"So you 'll have no daughter then," he mused, "unless" —

"Unless what?" she asked, for the moment unsuspicious.

"Unless you could make up your mind to be content with my Joan and wee Lizzie."

She looked away, knowing well now what he meant; but said simply, "They 're the same as daughters to me, ye ken fine, Jimmy."

"Yea, yea," he said, moving restlessly in his chair, "but how about myself?"

As she looked at him, smiling a little, he con-

tinued earnestly, "I 'm a grizzled old chap, Osla, and sometimes fair crippled with the rheumatics, and I 'm no got so much money as some ; but you 've done a deal o' kindness to me and mine, and it 's only right to say that my but-and-ben is yours, and all that I 'm got is yours — if you 'll have them ? "

She pursed her lips a moment, then said slowly, "You may always call upon me, Jimmy, for yourself or for the lasses ; but if you ask more 's what I can do as Eric's wife " —

"Woman ! " he cried, almost rising out of his chair in his excitement. "It 's full fifteen years since he sailed ! "

"Do you think I dona ken — to a day ? " she asked scornfully. "It 's no so long — and there 's tales of the sea. — My mother had the second-sight, and it 's in my blood. I tell you there 's word of him comin' back to me — across the ocean now ! I tell you, I feel it drawin' nearer and nearer ! If you ask me in two — three months — in six months, maybe, I 'll have news for you — of Eric ! "

She looked like a prophetess, as she sat clutching the arms of her chair, with parted lips and eyes that saw what he could not see.

The man was awestruck, and it was long before

he ventured to ask, "Where do you think he 's been biding all these years, Osla?"

"I canna say."

"Maybe, he 's married to another wife?"

"Na, na, it will no be that!"

"If you should hear only that — he 's dead?"

"Then — I 'll bide true to the memory of him. Get you home, Jimmy, you canna have but one wife; nor I but one man. Dona come to me again with your tales o' Joan and Lizzie!"

He rose at once, without protest, but with a sigh that caused her to relent somewhat: "Na, na, you 'll have a corn o' buttermilk first, and bide till the lass comes home."

When Jimmy rose again to go, Osla followed him to the gate — perhaps to give Charlie an opportunity of saying good-night to his sweetheart.

"Will you no think it over, Osla?" he asked for the last time.

"I 'm got a man," was the only answer she would make.

But long after Jimmy had gone his way down the valley, Osla still lingered without, half smiling at the sound of the young people's voices and yet very sad.

"There 's but the one thing," she said to herself at last. "When Nenie is gone" — ah, but she was

a long time getting beyond that word — "when Nenie is gone — gone South — God willin', I must have it out with Terval. For both our sakes, he canna say no."

CHAPTER VIII

A DISCOURSE BY THE TURF-DYKE

THE following Sunday, Terval was lost in a new book, and sat all day long by the kitchen fire, deaf and dumb through his mother's shrill rating.

But towards evening, when other folk were kirkward bent, he laid it down at last and went to stand in the doorway; and presently, to escape another outburst from the old woman, remarked that he would go and fetch home the kye. As he sauntered along the hill-slopes, he all but forgot his errand in the joy of the pure, fine air and the golden mists of evening.

After he had finished with Töna Tivla and Föna Fivla — so named by him from two fairies in an old rhyme, under strong protest from his mother — and had carried the milk into the house, he perceived Meggy-Betty with the Mansons' kye, and strolled down so that he was leaning over the turf-dyke when she got up from her milking. He had something to say to Meggy-Betty, but was in no haste to begin.

"So," he observed with a twinkle, "you milk

the kye while Laura puts on her Sabbath bonnet and saves her soul — eh ? "

" Aw, well," she answered, " she might do worse ; and so might you, Terval."

" But I have done better," said he, pulling his book from his pocket. " Look you now."

" Save us ! " she exclaimed, glancing at the title, " what 's yon name ? Bide here a peerie bit till I take the milk in, Terval, and then you shall tell me all about it."

She was gone rather more than a peerie bit, but Terval was too absorbed in his treasure to note this. Nor did he observe the more when she returned that her hair had been carefully smoothed away from her high, shining forehead and a bright blue and unbecoming ribbon tied about her neck. Meggy-Betty always looked the same to him.

" This," said he, waving it triumphantly, " is the Nibelungenlied."

At her blank look, he added patiently, " I have told you all about it before, Meggy-Betty."

She thought hard, then brought out with a gasp, " Is it about Sigurd ? "

It was a desperate venture, and she awaited his reply with bated breath.

" Nothing else, woman. Well, this Nibelungenlied " —

"It 's just wonderful it doesna cleave to your tongue," she interrupted admiringly.

He put the praise aside with a shake of the head and persevered: "was written in Germany about the year 1200" —

"1200," repeated Meggy-Betty meekly.

"And it tells about Sigurd, or Siegfried, as he 's called. I dona like it so well as the Volsunga Saga."

"Vols——" Meggy-Betty struggled bravely.

"Aye, the other one I told ye of, surely."

"I ken."

"Aw, this Siegfried — I canna make out how the name can be the same as Sigurd by any mutation of consonants — but ye 're no following me very well?"

Meggy-Betty's eyes showed that she was indeed rudderless on a wide sea.

"It doesna matter for that," he said kindly, to reassure her. "But it 's the tale that stirs a man's blood until he fair pines for the old days, when at least every freeman could do as he would." He brought his fist down with a thump on the earth wall between them. "There 's no a man to be found to-day like those in yon book."

"And maybe we should be thankful for that," she cried, "with their drinking and fighting and wading up to the knees in blood."

"Aw, but you dona understand. It 's the old Teutonic spirit that folk lack to-day. And ye 'll hardly ken what that means, Meggy-Betty, though you are a Norsewoman."

"Aye, we 're Norse," she began, much puzzled.

"On the one side, Meggy-Betty, on the one side," he corrected her. "But your mother came from Aberdeen and mine from Barra, so we 're both Scotch as well." He spoke with regret, but brightened as he added, "However, my father's father" —

Meggy-Betty had heard all these genealogies many a time, so she hastened to interrupt: —

"It 's very fine, I ken, for our fathers to have been like the folk in yon — Nib—— but for their drinking"—

"There you forget the difference," he put in eagerly. "A Teuton can drink deep and be none the worse of it; but a Celt has no self-restraint in such matters."

His face was so stern as he looked away from her up the valley that she dared not ask him what a Celt might be.

"Aw, Terval," she said, "if you could only get a chance to put all your book-learning to some use."

Then he turned and smiled down upon her earnest face: "I 'm got a chance, and that 's what I came to ask you about."

"Ask me?" she repeated, coloring with pleasure.

"Aye, it's a matter for opinion. I've been thinkin' it over all the week, and when I saw ye by the byre just now, I thought I might come and ask ye" —

She sent a hasty backward glance towards the kirk, and was relieved to find that the people were not yet coming out.

"It's this," said he. "Osla came up the other night, and offered to take mam to live with her at Gardie, since Nenie will be going South" —

"Will she go?" asked Meggy-Betty eagerly.

"So I said. She would pine in another house than Framgord."

"But surely" —

"Well, lass, well. Look you, then Osla said she would give up Gardie and go to live with mam" —

"It would be better for her to get away from the place where she looks for Eric day after day."

"Think you so?" said Terval, in some surprise.

"I think it might be better for the both of them," asserted Meggy-Betty, with unusual emphasis.

"What then would you have me do?" he asked guardedly.

She did not answer quite to the point. "With they two working together, and no rent to pay" —

"My mother canna work much," said Terval curtly.

"There would always be neighbors to help," she said, looking down a little.

"Would ye have me leave my mother to strangers, while I have hands?" he asked, with something of sternness.

"Well," — she smiled a little, — "it wouldna be just exactly strangers, to begin with; and then ye might be doing things better worth while."

"What call you better worth while?" he demanded.

"I canna very well say," she admitted. It's yourself should ken that, Terval."

"Aw, well," he said, "then I must wait a bit longer."

"But if Osla would be lonely, and glad to take your place?" she persisted.

"Osla canna take my place," he declared, "for reasons that it is hard to tell any one — even yourself, Meggy-Betty."

"Then if you had made up your mind before, why did you ask me?" she retorted.

"I hoped ye would say that the thing was out of all consideration," he answered at once.

She looked at him, grave and troubled, but said nothing.

"I know I am right," he continued slowly, "but it 's a comfort — whiles — to feel that other folk think the same."

She sighed. "Aw, well, right or wrong, Terval, it 's of no use to quarrel with you. Ye must geng your ways; but I 'm sore afraid" —

"Well?" he asked, when she would not finish.

"It 's no matter. Terval, think you I would understand yon book?"

He handed it gladly over the wall. "Take — take and read it carefully; and if you dona make much of it, I will explain when I have a little time. You 'll no find a woman in Setter that 's like the women of old times — dona think it, Meggy-Betty. But that 's the kind of woman a man can look up to. Why, there 's no lass in Setter who would so much as dare to go with her father to the fishin' — did ye ever hear of one?"

"Na, na," she had to admit.

"So, then." He turned away.

She was casting about for an excuse to detain him, when the people began to come out of the kirk, and she had to let him go.

"Indeed, I 'll no understand a word of yon book," she said to herself, with a hot face and a sheepish smile, "but I 'll just have a try."

CHAPTER IX

MEGGY-BETTY AT THE HERRING

THERE was a sensation in the Manson household, a few days later, when Meggy-Betty announced that she would like to go to the herring. Young Magnie, her eldest nephew, broke into a loud "Ho! ho!" which drowned her father's feeble cluck, and Laura's shrill protest. Magnie alone continued to smoke in silence, as he sat hugging one knee on the settle.

"You 'll be surely sick," chuckled the old man. "I ken nothing in the world sicklier as a fishing-boat dragging at her nets. There 's no a worse motion in the world. I mind weel the first time I went, when I was a peerie boy" — He quavered off into reminiscences.

"But why do you want to go?" asked Laura sharply, when grandfather had dropped into silence again. "After all these years that Magnie 's had a boat, why should you want to go now?"

"I dona ken rightly," began Meggy-Betty, but stopped to question herself. Why did she want to go? "I canna say," she concluded obstinately.

"But you 'll surely be in the way?"

"I dona think it. I can cook for them and make their tea."

"It 's a waste of time," continued Laura. She hardly ventured in her husband's presence to assert that Meggy-Betty could not be spared; the score was too heavy against herself, in respect to absences from home.

"I can take my knitting. Magnie, will you have me?" she pleaded.

"Surely, lass, surely; that I will," was his hearty answer. "Maybe you 'll bring us better luck. We have na had a good shot since the first o' last week. I 'm thinking the herrin' has gone South for the season. Three and a half barrels last time; it does na pay."

"Will she no be sick?" asked Laura.

"Well, it 's her own choosing if she is; she canna say much. Let the lass go if she will."

This settled the matter, and no later than on the morrow — a sunny afternoon, with a fair wind, but so strong that Magnie took a reef in the sail — Meggy-Betty sat huddled on the great heap of nets in the hold of the Live in Hope, sailing away through the voe to the northward.

One wonders what she was thinking about as she sat there, forgetting to knit, as motionless as a part

of the ship. Magnie glanced at her once or twice; but he was busy, and even if he had not been, had no skill to read the meaning of her, with its big, strong lines and dull, unchanging colors. And Meggy-Betty kept her thoughts to herself.

They sailed away from the harvest-clad slopes of Setter, beyond the points and the two little holms where the breakers are rarely still; past the smooth, tawny back of rabbit-haunted Hascosay; below the great red cliffs of Fetlar and past the rainbow stripes of its undulating fields; past Linga, with its Standing Stone high above the heather; past Muckle Ossa and Little Ossa; past Papil Holm, with its mounded Culdee Church; past Wedderholm, where the gray seals lie thick as limpets on the shingle; past Uyea, with its cosy white houses; past the Taing of Noustigarth, with its gaunt castle built centuries ago by a feudal oppressor; past low-lying, wide-watered Balta; past Saxavord and Hermaness, the giants of the North; and past the out-lying Ramna Stacks, the roosting-places of cormorants.

But after that, they turned away from the cosy farmsteads to the open sea, and in the swing and sway of the boat as she cut cross-currents, Meggy-Betty forgot the drift of her thoughts.

Now was the time for courage. With the feeling

that her cheeks were growing pale, she drew her hap closer and set resolutely to work knitting. Thus for a while all went well, and she was able to answer boldly when Geordie Spencer came up and asked was she sick; and Charlie Stewart put in that she was doing right enough; and Peter McKay swore there was no fear of her, while Magnie silently turned the wheel over to Joram, and went below to look out an extra smookie of his own to wrap about her.

The night came on, gray and lowering, with no sunset, and the slow roll of the tides broke into a sharper swell; but Meggy-Betty set her teeth and thought how the women of the old days would have laughed at her.

She had made tea for the lads in the big black teapot, had cut the bread and cheese and set out the butter and biscuits and jam on the table in the fo'c's'le. It occurred to Magnie, as he sat on the bench, having an eye upon her now and then, in intervals of reading the "Shetland Times," to wonder that Meggy-Betty had not married. She was plain, to be sure, but then she was homely; and many an uglier girl had got a good husband. He even went a step further, and wondered that none of his own fishermen had thought of her. Peter was married and so was Geordie, and Charlie was known to be

promised; but Davie was free and good-looking and steady and young — alas, too young! Then there was Joram — the very person, neither too young nor too good-looking — a lonely man who needed a wife. When they came down to tea, Magnie was seriously wondering if he could take any steps that would prove to be of mutual benefit to his sister and to the bachelor.

But Meggy-Betty was pouring Peter's tea and agreeing with him heartily as to the good points of his last "peerie lad," while Joram sat at the remote end of the bench, unconcernedly and thickly buttering hunks of bread. Magnie could see no reasonable way of leading up to the subject on his mind, so left it, for the present, to chance or fortune.

After tea they drew in the log and found that they were nearly a dozen miles off shore. Unst was a line of low black hills, Fetlar was almost hidden by the spray from the spouting whales.

A gull flew past, closely followed by a squawking comrade; there was a tussle, while something slender and shining dropped into the sea.

"A herring," said Magnie. "We 'll just stop here."

Straightway the steam capstan was set a-going, with Joram in charge. Peter and Geordie hauled

the nets out of the hold and tied to them the buoys and sinkers; Davie tossed them overboard and flung their ropes to Charlie, who knotted each in turn to the great cable, as it slowly uncoiled itself and was set adrift from the ship's stern.

When the process was complete, this cable would hold twoscore nets, each twenty fathoms long, and would sweep the sea for nearly a mile in all directions, and gather in countless herring as they swam away from the whales into the throttling cords.

All this was dimly realized by Meggy-Betty, as she sat by the skipper's side near the wheel. He was silently smoking, his mild eye ready to flash into keenness at the slightest blunder. Though she could not have put her feelings into words, she forgot sickness, forgot heroism — forgot everything except the pulse of strong, rhythmic labor and the long line of glossy, dark pony-skin buoys, bobbing away through the gray water, like the heads of men swimming.

But when the last net was lowered she became conscious that the keen wind was cutting her to the marrow, and that a cold wave within her seemed to be rising to her mouth, as the boat, anchored only to the dragging nets, began to spin round in the circular tides. Even when the mainmast was lowered into its rest to diminish the rocking, she repented

bitterly of the vaunt that she made to herself when Terval had talked of the courage of Norse women of long ago.

"Joram," called Magnie suddenly, "bring a cask and put it in the hold for Meggy-Betty to sit on. The wind 'll no be so bad there."

Quick-witted Peter smothered a laugh behind his hand; but Joram went innocently enough, and rolling up an empty cask, established Meggy-Betty thereupon.

Magnie watched the first stages of the process, then went below muttering something about supper. Joram looked wistfully after the skipper, then at the woman, and stroked his scrubby black beard in some perplexity, hardly knowing what was expected of him.

"Go down to your supper," she gasped, with her head in a whirl. "I 'm no wanting anything just now. I shall do very well here by myself."

Joram departed meekly, much relieved; but before she could fairly encounter the woe within her, this same meek Joram reappeared laden, by the skipper's orders, with a huge plate of biscuits and cheese and corned beef, and balancing with ease a brimming cup of tea. He deposited the plate on the deck just above her head, put the tea into her reluctant hands, then calmly sat down to his pipe,

having been commanded to see that she took her supper.

One gulp of hot tea she managed, and paused.

"You 're not feeling quite right, maybe," said Joram, watching her critically.

"Right enough," she answered, but his short laugh was disconcerting.

"Chaw on a bit of the salt beef," he suggested, and sucked cheerfully at his pipe.

She chewed and chewed and tried to think of the dear, steady land, of the solid harvest, — Terval was going to begin his, the week, — but the birds dipping among the waves for their supper brought her with a shiver back to the sea.

She looked at the rain-clouds in the west, and tried to forget the eternal dip, dip, dip of the lowered mast; but there came a sudden choke, resolutely quelled, and — Joram calmly smoked his pipe.

Presently, with intent to be polite to the skipper's sister, he remarked that she was as good a sailor as any of them; whereupon she chewed the more.

"I mind well my first night at the herring," he said. "I did right enough until we put down the nets, but when the boat began to stand on her head and kick out her heels, to wallow like a pig in the mud, to go through every kind of motion that a

beast or a ship could think of — then, I can tell you, I was fair sick. Aw — I was so! I felt like the waves was all inside me. My head — I couldna hold it up, it was that dizzy, and my mouth was full o' water and the waves in me riz and riz and riz" —

He stopped and gave a swift glance into the hold, then discreetly turned his broad smookie-clad back.

It was no ancient Norsewoman that he presently half led, half carried below, but a limp Shetland lass who was silently wishing all the sea at the bottom of the earth.

The dimly lighted fo'c's'le was cheery enough, except that on the table stood the remains of supper — cheese and butter that made the heart quail. She crawled into the bunk that they gave her, under the blanket-quilts, and for ten hours or more lay still and endured. If she lives to be a hundred, like old Ann Brown, who knows a person one day and forgets him the next, Meggy-Betty believes that the memory of this one night will abide with her.

When the watch had been set and the crew had pulled off their boots and smookies and had turned in, she lay as if spell-bound and ticked off the motions of the ship: a stillness for a second or two; then a slow winding up like a clock — here she

counted one, two, three, four, five; then a dizzy whirl and spin, while she counted seven or eight; then a sudden drop; then the whole process over again, with marvelous regularity. The one second of relief among so many of agony but heightened the torture.

It seemed to Meggy-Betty much as if she were in her own churn; the sound of the sea outside was like the swish of the buttermilk, and she herself was slowly turning to butter. Butter — butter — ugh! — the butter on the table! She looked away from it, looked at the smoking stove, at the great pile of dusky peats, at the slow swinging of a heavy chain on the wall, at somebody's oilskins puffing in the draft that came down the mast-hole. Peats — stove — it was comforting to be able to look at them; but over the stove hung a corpulent fish-kettle and a big ladle. Could she ever eat fried herring again?

Then as the night grew wilder, and the rain beat heavily on the deck, and the Live in Hope rolled and creaked among the waves, she tried to fix her mind upon some very earthy occupation, such as digging potatoes. She was roused from a slight doze by the rumbling of the capstan — they were trying the nets. Presently a dark figure came down the companion-way; there were a few mut-

tered words, and one by one the others bestirred themselves and got up to begin the haul. She was glad that they evidently thought her asleep; it saved questions.

"Half-past two," she heard somebody say, and counted the hours before she could be released from these dragging nets.

The men looked very strange in the shadowy light; Joram pulling on his sea-boots, his face purple-red above his bristly beard; Davie bending over the stove to make the tea, almost as grim as Broonie himself. But when three broad backs ranged themselves at the table in front of her, she shut her eyes; they would be at the butter again.

The darkness wore away into the blue dawn, while Meggy-Betty lay listening to the tramp of feet over her aching head, to the swish and thud of the heavy nets, to the creaking and rumbling of the capstan.

Presently some one appeared in the hatchway, dripping in his oilskins, with raindrops rolling from his sou'wester, his beard wet and glistening with herring-scales. It was Joram, sent by the skipper to inquire into Meggy-Betty's welfare.

"How are you now?" he asked, politely keeping his distance.

She raised herself on her elbow with the eager question, "How many barrels?"

"Maybe forty."

"No more?" She was disappointed. Had she not brought them luck after all her sufferings?

"Well, well, we shall see. Are you no comin' up to watch the hauling?"

"Yea," she answered boldly; but her head fell back on the bolster.

"I didna think you was so good a sailor," he concluded tactfully.

After this compliment, she had to struggle up on deck, and sit at the top of the ladder, shivering, even with her hap, in the keen, misty air.

The heavy nets rose slowly over the side, and poured cataracts of white and silver and opal over the deck, besides the steady stream that rushed ceaselessly into the hold, until the oilskin-clad men stood waist deep among the shining masses. Here and there a fish stuck, and had to be torn out by hand; sometimes the head and body parted, and were flung aside. Meggy-Betty had been to the gutting too often to mind this; but when, as rarely happened, she saw one that the net had failed to choke, gasping its life away, she longed to throw it back into the water.

Through her interest in the proceedings, she be-

gan to be reconciled to life. The boat was still tilting at all angles; but she clung to the great brown sail that lay in a heap by her side, and took heart to laugh at the men, slipping about and joking as they slipped. Even when Geordie, to save himself from going overboard, tumbled headlong into the hold, she was scarcely frightened. Nor was she perturbed when a whale went *z-zip* through one of the nets.

She liked it all; liked the rhythmic swinging of the nets, the strong odor of fresh-caught fish, the snow of scales that powdered the men's faces and even her own.

Once Joram made a joke. He flung towards the blue-nosed, hungry figure near the hatch a gray emerald-eyed dog-fish, still breathing feebly.

"There, Meggy-Betty. That 's what eats the herring same as we; that 's what takes the food out of our mouths. Fry him for our breakfast."

And Magnie called cheerfully, "Close upon sixty barrel. Lass, you 've brought us luck surely."

This was all very well, and so was the homeward journey, though it was constant tacking against head winds. Meggy-Betty sat by the skipper, sailing home like the daughter of Vikings that she was.

And when they turned into the voe she found that word of her exploit had gone abroad, so that

a goodly crowd had collected on the frail little pier to see her come in.

"Well," said Magnie, as he threw the rope up to the waiting hands, "here 's the lass that brought us luck! She fair choked up the sea with the herrin'! Who says she is n't the bravest lass in Setter?"

"Was she sick?" asked half a dozen voices.

"Never a bit!" swore Joram; whereupon the skipper smiled to himself.

But in the first flush of all the commendations upon her bravery Meggy-Betty's joy fell away, for as she looked eagerly from face to face of those gazing down upon her she found that Terval's was not among them.

CHAPTER X

A BAD NIGHT AT FRAMGORD

THE night that Meggy-Betty went to the herring was rough on land. The storm was severely felt at Framgord, because here is no shelter when the wind is from the east. Terval came in about eight o'clock, having fed and housed all the beasts, and said to his mother, who sat close to the peats in her long-eared armchair, idle, though her knitting was on her belt, that the light on the Skerries could not be seen and heavy breakers were rushing into the voe.

"It will be a coarse night for the boats," he added, pouring out a bowl of buttermilk for his supper.

"Yea, yea," she muttered, more to herself than to him, "that it will! That it will!"

"They were expecting a fine night too!"

"Lord ha' mercy on them!" she crooned, rocking herself a little.

"There 's many a woman will have no sleep, the night!" he answered, in the curious chanting tone which with him always showed a high degree of emotion or excitement.

"Yea, yea," she assented. "Did ye ken," she asked abruptly, "that Meggy-Betty went out with Magnie?"

"Na," with much surprise. "Meggy-Betty to the herring? Who told you?"

"A man passed by, the day," she answered crossly. "Ye think that I ken nothing because I live so much by myself."

"But why should Meggy-Betty go?" he repeated, in wonder.

"I dona ken," she answered, moving uneasily in her chair. There seemed a strange kind of excitement upon her; her mouth worked constantly and her fingers twitched, but would not busy themselves with the knitting.

Terval leaned against the chimney-piece, staring into the fire, until with a crash the but-door banged open, and the rain was in upon them. Snarling, roaring, wailing, moaning beneath the lash of the wind, it made the whole house tremble before Terval could make all fast again. It seemed at times as if the very floor would rise under their feet. But the dwellers at Framgord were used to this, and to far worse, and the old woman only muttered drearily, "God save us!"

"God save all fishermen!" said her son reverently, as he looked again to see that door and window were

secure. "If it wasna for those at sea," he mused, "I could listen to the wind as gladly as to the finest music I have ever heard." Then he tried to follow, in a low humming, the waves of sound that rose and fell against the window.

"It were a night like this," sighed the old woman, "when your father went to sea for the last time."

"Aye, mother," said he, "and ye'll be lonely sitting here and remembering it all. So I'll leave my reading to-night and bide with you till ye can sleep."

"Na, na," she cried fretfully. "Get you upstairs to your books. An old woman must bear the sorrow in her heart."

He looked at her rather anxiously, and stroked his beard awhile before he said, "I'll better stay. Ye'll maybe wanting me and no able to make me hear for the wind."

But this was so manifestly not to her liking, that after a time he lighted the small lamp that he used in his bedroom and wished her good-night.

When the sound of heavy footsteps above had been merged in the scraping of a chair, and this in turn had been followed by the intermittent tapping of a foot which presently ceased, the old woman rose very quietly and mended the fire,

paused and listened, then moved stealthily towards the cupboard and came back to her chair hugging a stone ginger-beer bottle.

But the fragrance of the liquor, when she had found herself a glass and had begun to pour into it, was nothing akin to that of ginger-beer.

"It will be only a wee drop," she told herself; "just enough to keep the heart together on a night like this."

She sipped, and held the glass before the fire to bring out the glow of the liquor. "A bonnie medicine? Aye, yon revenue inspector knew the taste of it. If it werena for a sixpence here and a sixpence there, and a traveling tinker now and then to bring it to me from Lerwick, I 'd never see the like of it. Aw, well, where 's the harm, and Terval safe at his books? It 's many a drop I 'm had afore ever *he* sailed to Barra to bring me here; and am I to be without it because my son 's a Rechabite? Na, na!"

The rain slapped so dismally against the window that she shivered and took another wee drop. No harm at all; and a pleasant glow in the breast. She poured out a third time.

"It 's the comfort of it," she said to herself, "and I call it a hard thing for an old wife to pay double the money to have it brought sixty mile, when I might get it peaceably at home, if he only

liked a drop himself. It isna as if I would ever take too much," she added, as she noiselessly set the bottle and glass on the floor, within easy reach of her arm. "I 'm a woman of sense, I am, and I wouldna think of drinking one drop more than was good for me — no. I — though he might say I did. If Barbie was at home now, she wouldna be cruel to her old mother — no she — I want my lass" —

She blinked into the fire and began to whimper, but soon fell into a doze from which she was roused by a fiercer outbreak of wind.

"God ha' mercy," she muttered, "on them that 's abroad this night."

Her thoughts spun round upon themselves in a circle; and so between sleeping and waking she passed the time until the old clock droned out its slow stroke of ten. Then she moved mechanically to undress; and having forgotten all about the bottle by her chair, overturned it with a clink on the stones.

"Lord save us!" she groaned, as with no thought beyond a blind desire to save the precious brown liquid trickling along the floor she hastily sopped it up with her apron.

Then in sheer woe and wonder that after all she had not succeeded in gathering up what was spilled,

she sat down and took a little more, if only to prove that some still remained for another day. The chief blessing that she wept over was that Terval above had given no sign of hearing.

But her fancies were not pleasant now: the old tales of trows and ghosts and witches came out of dark corners in her brain, and strange creatures looked at her from shadowy corners of the room, until, sick with terror of the unknown, she crept to her bedside and began to fumble at the buttons of her dress.

All in a moment, above the drift of wind and rain, she heard the feeble beating of hands on the door.

She sat paralyzed, with the cold fear creeping up her body to the back of her heavy brain, fear of the ghosts of drowned sailors come up from the sea. . . .

She buried her head in the pillow for some while, and when she furtively lifted it again the knocking had ceased, but there was come a fumbling at the latch. It was never locked, save only this one night when Terval had bolted it against the blows of the wind. The clicking sound died away, and for a moment the old woman breathed again.

But suddenly the blows came fierce and strong, as if struck by hands that were desperate.

The old woman rose slowly, with her palms crossed on her breast, muttering hoarsely, "If any evil thing be without, in the name of God I bid it depart!"

A silence followed, and then a shrill cry above the wind — a cry that sent the old woman tottering to undo the door. Better a trow, perhaps, than Terval's anger.

Slowly and cautiously she moved the bolt, and tried to peer into the darkness. At first she saw nothing; then a hand, white and sparkling with rings, was laid on the door-post.

The old woman drew back with a shaking jaw. "Eh, but it's a trow," she quavered.

The hand moved swiftly up, and the lamplight gleamed suddenly on a glory of hair.

Then she knew the meaning of it all, and with a strength beyond her own shut the door, — though there seemed to be some desperate resistance from without, — and crept back to the hearth, moaning and mumbling as she buried her face on her knees.

Close at hand rose again that shrill cry: "Terval!" And yet again fainter and as if descending the hillside. The woman within shut her ears to its shrillness, but heard it unceasingly in her heart.

She did not hear Terval come down the stairs, but presently he stood over her, heavy-eyed with reading and frowning in anxiety.

"Mother, I heard a cry," he began.

Then she began to rock herself and to wail. "It was her ghost, Terval; I saw it as I 'm seein' thee. Oh, my bairn is dead — is dead — is dead."

But the meaning of his frown had changed. The air of the room had betrayed the secret sin before he saw the bottle or his mother's face.

He looked at her in silence, then flung open the door and stared out into the rain. A moment he listened, then put up his hand and sent a sonorous "Ahoy there!" down the hillside. Several times he repeated it, with no response, then closed the door and returned to his mother.

"There 's none without," he said, with a kind of patient weariness. "Woman, you 've surely been dreaming. Come, get you to bed."

He seized her by the shoulder, not ungently, but she drew back, resisting. "I tell thee I saw her as plain as I see thee — her ghost — Barbie's. Oh, my bairn — my bairn!"

He shook his head over her in a kind of pity, understanding well enough what these visions meant; yet he tried to reason with her.

"It was some neighbor woman, mam, and you 've

shut her out in the rain. Ye should have brought her in to the fire." . . .

She pounced upon his first words. "Neighbor? It were no neighbor! My bairn is dead!"

He paused, remembering the shrill cry that had stirred him from his dreams of Kjartan and Bolli. It might have been the wind, and yet — after all — he was minded to see.

He took the stone bottle from the table and set it on the chimney-shelf, and for a moment his mouth was grim.

"If Barbie was to come home," muttered the old woman drearily; and repeated the phrase again and again until her head fell forward on her bosom and so remained.

Terval removed the coverlet from the bed, then returned to the hearth, and lifting his mother easily enough, for all that she was a heavy woman, carried her across the room and laid her down. After that he drew off her boots, and placing her in as comfortable a position as might be, tucked the coverlet about her.

He stood looking down upon her with something very like despair in his face, remembering the first time that he had done these things; but roused himself presently, fetched his oilskins and sou'wester from the hook behind the door, and put them on.

This done, he carefully lowered the lampwick, and choosing two blazing peats, he turned their red sides together, and so taking them up in the tongs, went out into the storm.

His improvised torch sent a spire of red flame into the night and guided him safely down the stony path to the road.

But there the downpour of rain was so heavy that his light was all turned to smoke and useless. Dropping the tongs, he walked on, almost as fast as he would have done by day, and at intervals he sent a ringing shout into the night, but had never a response.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROAD BY THE VOE

It was something of a marvel that Terval could tread this rough road in a darkness as thick as if he had been blindfolded, and never approach the steep banks that overhung the sea. Once or twice he went rather near the inner side of the road, where the little burn trickles along between it and the upper hill-slopes; but always in time he knew the sound of it through the patter of the rain.

The few lights still burning looked dim and blurred, and Terval, perceiving that most of the folk had gone to bed, called himself a fool for his pains and ran the more.

He reached the head of the voe, where the road to Skaw crosses at right angles that to The Hara, without finding a trace of human presence; and as he stopped there, wondering which direction he should take, or whether it was better to turn homewards, the wind suddenly dropped and there was silence except for the now steady padding of the rain. Before he had made up his mind what to do he heard a low, broken wailing sound that seemed

to be on the right-hand side of the road, not far away.

For a moment old trow stories flitted through his mind: there was a man at Colvidale who was taken away as he was going home on a stormy evening, and was never seen again, and for twenty years after, on Michaelmas morn, the wife always found the sum of the rent by her bedside. . . .

Such fancies gave way to the belief that some animal might have fallen and be lying in pain. It might be a lost lamb which he ought to take into shelter. He moved a little nearer, and waited until the sound came again. It was like a choking sob, with intervals of holding the breath.

"That 's no lamb," he said to himself, "whatever the beast may be. It 's more like a bairn."

His foot touched something soft, and the sobbing changed to a sharp scream. He had grazed the hand of a little child.

He stooped and found a tiny figure huddled on the edge of the burn. It shrank away from him, calling, "Mummy! mummy!"

Terval knelt motionless, frozen with wonder. This was surely no Shetland bairn; it was a child from the South or a trow.

"Where 's mother?" he asked the little one, and had no answer. The bairn only crawled away, and

as Terval fumbled again to find it, his hand touched something else, the soft wool of a Shetland hap. It was after all, then, a neighbor woman who had fallen into the burn.

He spoke to her and shook her, but she did not move or answer. He felt for her face, and found it against the bank, many inches above the water. She was not drowned, then. He was inexpressibly relieved at the touch of the hap, freed of the mad, foolish fear that in some way Barbie might have been unhappy out in the world, might have run away and come home. — But now he could laugh at himself for having forgotten that this was the week when there was no steamer.

Yet he was sorely puzzled to know what to do. He was nearly a mile from Framgord; besides — what help was there? He was a good half-mile from the other houses. If the bairnie could walk and would come with him, he might carry the woman to the nearest neighbor's. . . .

The little one was beating the motionless figure now, with a desperate call of "Mummy! mummy!" and the sound must have reached her in her swoon, for Terval grew aware that she was moving and struggling a little to get up the bank.

He dragged and lifted her to the roadside, and for a moment she leaned against him gasping.

Then she spoke in a hoarse muffled voice: "Who is here?" And Terval would have known the voice in the whirl of London or the heart of the desert.

He gave no sign of the emotion that for a second nearly blinded and choked him, but said quietly, "Is it you, Barbie? Can you stand? Come — try."

"Terval," she whispered, and then, "You turned me away."

"Na, na," he answered, in the same quiet voice; "come — come home."

Suddenly her fingers clutched his arm fiercely. "Give me the baby."

"Look you," he said, and tried to direct her attention to the little one, who was now cuddled against her side.

"No," she whispered in the same fierce tone; "the other."

"Wait," he soothed her; and with a sickening memory of the burn, groped along the bank until he came upon another shawl and lifted what it held dripping from the water. He knew before he passed his hand over the little face and felt for the heart-beat what he must find.

"Have you got her?" called his sister, in a hard voice.

"Aye." He tenderly dried the little face and

hands as well as he could and drew the shawl close.

"I can't think how she slipped from my arms. Give her to me. Is she asleep still?"

"Shall I carry her?" he asked. "I can open my oilskins — so."

"And keep her dry," she said, in the same hard tone. "Carry her softly, Terval, I would n't have her wakened. Come, Christy, we 're going home now."

Terval had still a hand with which to help her to her feet. He hesitated scarcely a second before turning her face away from Framgord.

"Hold me fast by the arm," he said, and with Christy clinging to her skirts and whimpering a little, they moved along the road towards Osla's. The little wind that there was helped them on their way.

"Are we near home?" she asked presently.

"Na, na," he answered, and felt impelled to add that he was taking her to Gardie.

"To Osla?" she repeated, wondering at first. Then, "I remember now; mother turned me away."

"Be patient, lass, till you know the way of it. Osla will be glad to have thee."

She stopped short. "Give me my baby."

"I have the bairn," said Terval, urging her onward.

"It 's Terval," she whispered, "but I can't think how we got here. Oh, Christy, Christy — you 're crying; and mother 's too tired to carry you another step."

"I can take him in the other arm," began Terval, but she stopped him.

"No, give me the baby. Nobody should carry her but myself. Take Christy then. We 've traveled a long way to-day. Give her to me."

He was expectant of an outcry, but she made none, only fondled the little thing, rocking it and hushing it as if she feared it might wake.

"She sleeps fine," she whispered presently, with a faint laugh.

He could not answer, and they tramped on in silence with their burdens.

"Terval," she said at last, "why did mother shut the door in my face?"

"Aw — we were not expectin' you, ye ken, Barbie; and she thought you were a trow or a ghost."

"A trow?" Her laughter broke forth unrestrained. "A trow? Aye, I mind the Shetland. I havena forgotten anything. A trow!"

"Aw, well, Barbie, we must be patient with the

old people who havena lost their belief in such-like things as ghosts."

"But a mother — should love — the ghost of — her own child," she said haltingly.

She loosed her hold of his arm, and he perceived that she was taking off her hap to put round the baby. He protested against the baring of her own head, but she would not listen.

"She 's wet, and I cannot let her be cold."

"Terval," she added, as they walked on again, "I 'm bringing disgrace to you. I 've run away from my home and my husband."

"Well, well, to-morrow" — he began.

"It was like fire eating into me, till I was mad" —

"So — so. We 'll no speak of it just yet. Come in to Osla now."

"She 'll turn me away," she whispered, shrinking back.

He made no answer, but broke the string that alone latched the door, and half pushed, half dragged his sister within.

"Is it trows?" called Osla's voice between laughter and fear, "or am I bidden to come show Jeanie Smith how to wash a new-born baby?"

"Na, na," said Terval, "it 's Barbie home again."

There followed the scraping of a match, a point of flame touched the candle by Osla's side, and showed her dark cheek; and from behind the curtains of the second bed Nenie's peering face, with its wide frightened eyes and halo of golden hair.

One moment Osla stared at Barbie as she stood trembling, with one hand on the arm of the settle and the other clasping her child; and no feature of the white mud-stained face shadowed by the disheveled glowing hair was lost to those kindly dark eyes.

Suddenly Barbie held out the baby to her brother, and before any of them could move or speak, had slipped to the floor with her head against the settle.

Terval looked at Osla steadily a moment, then carried the baby away ben and laid it on the bed, leaving the three women alone.

CHAPTER XII

"PEERIE MOOTIE LAMMIE"

WHEN he had undone the shawls and was feeling in vain for any sign of life Nenie came in.

"Mother said I was to" — She stopped short at the man's look and attitude.

"Hush!" said he. "Dona cry out."

She clasped her hands tightly to keep back the sudden tears, and waited dumbly for him to tell her what to do.

He covered the child's face again, then said, "We must do what we can for Barbie. Send thy mother to me."

She turned at once, hastily drying her tears on her apron; and in a second Osla stood by his side.

"You found the candles, I see," she began; then stopped as Nenie had done.

"The bairnie 's dead," he said at once.

She went up to the bed and put aside the hap. The muscles of her cheek and chin worked a little, but she neither shed tear nor uttered sound.

"Shall I fetch the doctor, think you? — for her?" He nodded towards the other room.

At this they heard Barbie's voice calling, "Bring the baby to me."

"I must go," said Osla rapidly. "Nenie will never be able to keep it from her in the world. We must do that — you and I; and Nenie must fetch the doctor."

They returned and found Barbie sitting up in Osla's bed, with her eyes bright and intent upon their coming.

"Where is she?" she called, before she fairly saw them.

"Nenie," said Osla, "be a brave lass. Just put thy hap over thy head and run up for Dr. Cochrane."

"I want no doctor," said Barbie sharply. "I want my bairn."

"Yea, lamb, yea," Osla soothed her; and to Nenie, "I'll set the lamp in the entry to light thee all the way."

"I 'm no afraid of Broonie," said the girl, though her under lip trembled a little and her eyes were dilated.

She sped away, notwithstanding Barbie's protests. Osla came back from the entry and got out some milk to heat. Terval needlessly began to make up the fire and stared into the flames.

A sudden movement from the bed startled both.

Barbie was attempting to rise, and would have succeeded had not Terval's arm interposed.

"Ye 'll just bide where ye are, lass, and take some of the hot milk Osla 's bringing."

She yielded to his strength, but said doggedly, "I 'll no take a drop unless you give me my bairn."

Terval's eyes met Osla's, and he left the initiative to her. It seemed a long time before she said, "She might lie here in thy bed by the wall; but ye must not touch her nor waken her."

"No," said Barbie, with sudden red spots in her cheeks.

Then Terval laid her gently back on the pillow and went to fetch the little one.

Osla's lean brown hand intercepted him. "Put this shawl o' mine about her," she whispered, "and cover her up well."

A certain content came into Barbie's eyes when he laid the little thing softly by the wall. She seemed scarcely to look at it, and made no movement to touch it.

It was an anxious time for the two watchers, but their faces showed nothing but grave gentleness as Terval fed and undressed wee, tired Christy, and Osla coaxed the other poor wanderer to eat.

But long after Christy was fast asleep in Nenie's

bed Barbie was still pushing food away and trying to talk.

"He is stopping at a friend's house for the shooting," she said, as if she had spoken of the matter before. "He will not know that we have come home. I left a letter for his mother, and I lied in it — as I learned to do in the South — and made her believe we had gone to a different place altogether. Oh, we were so tired" —

"Yea, yea," interposed Terval gently, "and so is Osla's arm, my lass, wi' holdin' out that spoonful of your supper."

She barely tasted it and put it aside. "I 'm past hunger," she said. "Let me tell you how it was. I had only a little money, and I would n't take any from him. So I just sold a few bits of things and ran away in my Shetland dress — I kept it by me all these years because sometimes" —

Terval took the spoon from Osla. "But how did you come when there 's no steamer, the day?" he asked, trying to keep her attention on the story while he fed her.

"We came second-class to Leith, — twenty women and not room enough for twelve, — and when I had paid for my night there, I had only enough for a steerage ticket to Lerwick. We walked on to-day" —

"Walked, lamb?" cried Osla.

"To Nesting, and came over in the packet-boat, and then we walked again. And when we had passed Kirkabister I thought I could remember the old short turf-road across the moors. But sometimes I had the two children to carry and always the one, and we had nothing to eat, for we saw no houses, and I could n't find the way. There 's no saying how far we walked, for when the storm came on it blinded me. And I kept thinking that every valley would be the last and every hill would look down upon the toon until the night came on. And at last" — she lapsed suddenly into her native tongue — "I dona rightly ken."

She pushed Terval away. "Na, na, I 'm had enough. Hsh — the lassie 's stirring. She 'll be hungry now. But perhaps I have nothing to give her."

She turned herself over, facing the little one. Terval would have leaned forward in protest, but Osla lifted a warning finger and whispered, "It will make her worse. We cannot stop her. The doctor will be here soon."

Barbie put her hand out to the baby and timidly, almost cautiously, drew it towards her. It seemed to those watching that she was careful not to move the hap. Raising herself on one elbow so that they

could see her gleaming eyes and feverish cheeks, she began to move the little thing gently from side to side, patting it as mothers often do when babies are half awake and on the point of crying.

"I must stop her," muttered Terval, but again Osla's finger restrained him. "You will do no such thing, man. Go back to the fireside."

He submitted to her; and as he sat there, oppressed with grief and anxiety, he heard Barbie singing little snatches of a lullaby, of which he caught only the refrain, "Peerie, mootie lammie!" repeated until it became unbearable.

Terval went to stand by the window, hoping to see the doctor's lantern on the road. He heard Barbie say: —

"Is it no a wee little voice that she has, Osla? I can scarce hear her cryin'. You 'll maybe no hear her at all?"

Osla made no answer, and Terval began to pace the floor from window to hearth and back again, at last stopping short midway with his eyes on the bed. In silence they waited what she must inevitably learn.

She did not scream. After a long time she spoke Osla's name. "She 's no taking her milk well; and she 's very cold. Would you no have a look?"

Osla laid a gentle, toil-roughened hand on the

hot forehead. "Sleep you now," she said, "and give me the bairn."

But the mother clutched her baby close. "Na — na — na — na!" she whispered, over and over again. Her eyes fell before Osla's steady, sorrowful glance, and for a moment she lay impassive; then suddenly she thrust away the hap and gazed at the little white face.

Even then she made no outcry. She looked and looked, and finally touched it in a kind of wonder, then replaced the hap and held the little one close as if to give it warmth.

"Who did it?" she asked quietly.

"Barbie, lass, give her to me."

"Who did it, I say?"

Terval came up to the bed. "Nobody kens, Barbie, how it happened. I found it so by the road."

Osla silently tried to take the baby from her arms, but she resisted desperately.

"Nobody kens?" she repeated, in the same low voice. "I ken. I kenned all the while; but I wouldna ken. We fell — I fell with her — it's God's judgment on me — wicked — I kenned it from the first moment; but I wouldna believe. I said if I dinna believe, God wouldna let it be so. But He has. Ye would have kept it from me, and

I kenned all the while — all the while — but I wouldna " —

At the sound of footsteps on the stairs outside, she started up as if to leap from the bed, crying, " Run, Christy, run! They 're after us! Run! I 've got the bairnie — I 'm coming! "

It was Nenie who entered, and with her the doctor.

CHAPTER XIII

MORNING-SORROW

WHILE the mists of dawn still capped the hills, Terval walked along the edge of the voe to Framgord.

Framgord, — the outermost homestead, lying nearest to the open sea, — it never before seemed so far to him, or so lonely and wind-blown on its hilltop, as in the gray shadows of this morning of sorrow.

Slowly he climbed the stony slope, passed through the little gate into the homely garth, with its cabbages and turnips and wild pink sweet-williams. He paused before the blank stone wall of the high bare house and rested his eyes a moment on the sea; but it was turbulent and muddy, and no comfort was to be had of it.

Within the kitchen the unpleasant smell of paraffin contended with that of whiskey. Terval hastily put out the light, for it had burned low almost to the point of explosion, and flung the door wide to let in the fresh breath of the morning.

After that he dropped wearily on the settle and

rubbed his hands through his hair and beard — a way of his when perplexed. He must have sat there a long time, with no sound in the room except that of his mother's heavy, uneven breathing, for he was roused at length by a pale streak of sunlight falling through the open door across his boot.

He stirred, then raked out the fire and made it up, fetched water from the well, and set the kettle swinging on the crane before he went out to care for the animals — all much as he had done on that other morning thirty years before.

When he returned, he found his mother awake and sitting on the edge of the bed. She stared at him stupidly as, without a word, he set about making the porridge. He did not trust himself at the time to speak to her.

She waited a while, looking as if she dimly realized that something had gone wrong, and at length spoke his name.

"Well, mother?" His words and tone were cool enough; but she shrank from his eyes.

"I'll — I'll be getting up and cooking the breakfast," she said timidly.

He watched her as she made one or two ineffectual attempts to rise, and at last got to her feet, clutching the bed-curtains with one trembling hand. She seemed unable to go farther alone, so he crossed

over, seized her arm, though she protested and tried to withdraw it, and led her to her chair.

"Now, mother," he said, "ye 'll tell me where you bought the whiskey." His tone was patient, but inflexible.

She whimpered, but made no reply.

"Tell me," he repeated, without raising his voice or removing his gaze from her.

Perhaps the events of the preceding night were really as yet confused in her brain. At all events, she asked feebly, "What then?"

"Will you tell me or no?"

She muttered something which he did not understand.

"Aw, well, it must all go the way of this."

Before she knew what he was about he seized the stone bottle that he had set on the chimney-piece the night before, shook it and, although it was nearly empty, poured its contents into the fire. "I thought we had done with all that years ago, mother," he said, with a pained look in his eyes.

The tears gathered and rolled down her cheeks as she watched the sputtering blue flames that told of precious liquor wasted.

"Now," said he, returning the bottle to the mantel-shelf, "where did you get it?"

"Davie Smith."

"The peddler? Did he give it to you?"

"I bought it" — her anger rose a little, but quickly dropped away into quaverings — "I bought it."

"Where did you get the money?"

"From the teas that I give folk when they pass this way."

"You took money from guests?"

"And why no? We always did in my own home, afore ever I came here. What have you to say to that? Who ever heard of a son speaking so to his old mother?" She fell into helpless crying.

He poured out a cup of tea. "Drink this, mother," he commanded. "I have a thing to say to you."

She was afraid to refuse, but eyed him sidewise as she drank. He, however, paid no attention to her, but stared grimly into the fire, rising once to set the porridge aside, for it was done.

When she had finished he took away her cup, and she put up her crabbed hands — perhaps to ward off what she feared, or to plead with him, or to draw him to her — and spoke his name with endearments.

He did not withdraw from her, nor did he respond to her caress; but his first words burst upon her like a thunderbolt.

"Barbie came home yestreen, and you turned her away," he said gravely.

"Terval, you 's surely dreaming," she gasped, when she could get her breath.

He looked at her and smiled slightly.

"Terval, tell me it 's no true! Say it 's no true!" she began passionately, but he stopped her.

"Sit down, mother. It 's true as that you were drinking just before she came."

"It was but a drop," she pleaded, "and the wind and the storm" —

"We 'll no mind about that now," he said. "What 's done is done."

"Where is she?"

"With Osla."

She considered this awhile, then asked, with a new sharpness in her eye, "Where 's her man?"

"She has come alone; she has left her husband," said Terval slowly.

"Why?"

"I dona ken."

"'Left him,' say you? Left her husband? Shame o' women! I would turn her out again!"

"'Shame o' women!'" he repeated in his turn. "You say that, mother?"

She understood, perhaps as much from his look as from his words, — understood, and fell silent.

He began again with slow emphasis: —

"Barbie came home yestreen with two bairns, and — and now there 's but one."

She glanced up at the mantel-shelf, where stood the photograph of the baby, and asked, "What mean you?"

He was loth to explain, but hardened his heart to the necessity. For her own sake she must know before any of the neighbors came in; their telling would be worse.

"The peerie lassie died — after you turned Barbie away."

"I dreamed it was her ghost — Barbie's. I didna ken" —

"Na, na, you didna ken, and why?"

She had no answer to that.

"She stumbled away from here, in the rain and the dark, and fell — with the child. It slipped from her arms into the burn and — was drooned."

Her voice rose in a shrill, haunting wail, the coronach of her native hills. It may have been instinctive, this outcry at the sudden presence of death. It did not seem to grow out of any consciousness of guilt on her part.

For the first time he spoke roughly to her: "Woman, be still!"

He waited to see if any realization of her deed

would come to her, and waited in vain. Then patiently, but inexorably, he went through his painful task again, until at last he saw by her changed look that she understood. She laid a shaking hand on his sleeve. "I 'll never touch it again, Terval."

"You 've said that before."

"But there was ten year that" —

"After you broke my father's heart. Must it always be *after*, mother?"

She pressed her face against his sleeve.

"Do you no mind, mother, it was a night like yestreen when the boats were lost off Gloup."

"Aye, aye; it was for remembering that I fell into the way of it again. I could never sleep for seeing the faces o' them that 's drooned."

His tone seemed unrelenting as he continued: "And the day they brought my father home you were — as you were yestreen; and the day he died."

He stopped abruptly, perhaps realizing the uselessness of words.

"Ye 'll come down to Barbie when you may?" he asked more kindly.

She nodded assent; then broke out into sudden fierceness. "Osla 's no her mother. Let me go down to my bairn."

"You 're not to go till you 're bidden by the doctor."

At this she wept awhile, and presently whimpered, "You 're over hard wi' me, Terval."

"I 'm sorry for it," he said, but his eyes were stern upon her. "It 's the devil of drink in you, mother, that I 've been fighting for thirty years. Three year ago I thought you might be trusted" —

"And have ye forgot, man, that my father died of it? And his father afore him? And God knows how many afore him?"

"But you 'll no die of it, mother," he said grimly, "not unless you live the longer of us two."

"Na, na; I 'll never touch it again," she cried.

"Aw, well — we shall see."

He set out the breakfast and, without more words, they ate as they could. Then he took up his cap, and she knew very well where he was going.

"Come back soon and tell me, Terval," she begged. "I canna bide here alone. God save me, I 'm a wicked woman!"

He came back then and took her hands in his, and stooped to kiss her cheek. "Well, mother, well," he said. "We must win out some way, you and I. It 's a hard fight that doesna come to a right end, if we hold out long enough."

CHAPTER XIV

A FOOL AND HIS COMFORTER

THERE was much food for the toon gossips the week that followed Barbie's home-coming; but the amount that was actually known, as Laura Manson said, would not have lasted for the tying up of a parcel of tea. Many a neighbor climbed up the steep path to Framgord, to offer her services and condole with the old woman; but it was nearly always Terval who met them at the door, answered as few questions as possible, and received their sympathy in grim silence. None among them suspected how much greater the need for it was than anything they knew.

When they went to Gardie, Osla did not indeed refuse their help; but she was so amazingly close-mouthed about the whole matter that they were left for the most part to conjecture.

But the centre of interest in the community was the scene that had occurred between the two ministers, the day Barbie's bairn was laid in the kirkyard.

The funeral, because of Barbie's illness, was held

from Jimmy Robertson's house; but exactly what took place there the women had to glean in fragmentary fashion from their men, who were throughout grimly silent.

It was Joan Robertson who could have told more than any one else; but Joan spoke no word.

At the hour set for the funeral she had taken wee Lizzie across to Gardie, so as to be out of the way; and while the little girl made friends happily with Christy over heaps of shells and wave-washed pebbles, the older sister sat on the doorstep and would not go in, for all Nenie's entreaties.

Joan sat very still, — a dark elf with her cheeks in her palms, — watching the groups of men in their black clothes coming down the hills and round the voe. Some time after Mr. Keith had left the Manse Joan was suddenly aware of a face looking at her over the high stone wall.

Her eyes opened wide, and she stared without moving at the broad red face, with its light blue eyes and yellow mustache, and the sun sparkling on the flies in the tweed cap, jauntily askew on the light curling hair.

"Hsh!" said Joan, seeing that he was about to speak, and ran hastily over behind the gooseberry-bushes that screened him from the playing children.

"What 's up, Joan?" he laughed. "You look as solemn as a funeral."

Then his eyes followed her involuntary backward glance over her shoulder, and he exclaimed, "Cæsar! I 'd forgotten all about it. I thought — I was under the impression it was to be to-morrow."

Notwithstanding his genuine dismay, there was a gleam of amusement in his eyes as he asked, "How can I make it good, Joan?"

"I dona think there is any way," she began gravely; but he answered himself: —

"I 'll tell you. I 'll just leave my rod and bag here. It 'll be better than not going at all."

"You 're not properly dressed, Mester Murray," she admonished him.

"Should I not go, then?"

"No, sir," said Joan.

"'No,' says the little minx. Well, I must be off, then. If Keith could see us now he would feel justified in all his remarks about my philandering with the lasses."

"Did he say that?" asked Joan.

"He said various things of the sort — which are about equally true. But perhaps he believes them. I 'm — sorry about to-day. I should n't have forgotten if it had been anybody that I know, but I never so much as saw the woman or the child" —

"Hsh!" she cautioned him, with a glance first at the unconscious Christy, then at the house.

"I 've been over at Gossawater all the morning — no luck at all, and I was going to fish Vatster this afternoon; but I must give it up now. Hey, Joan, I think I 'd better go down after all. Surely they 'll hold with me that the clothes are not the man — as Carlyle or somebody says."

"I think they would not be pleased," said Joan bravely. "I have heard them say a minister should always wear his blacks" —

He was scarcely heeding her. "Yes, yes, I 'll go; and perhaps I may have an opportunity of making it all right with him."

He laid his tackle down in the grass, and was off before she could put further objections into words. She ran a few steps to intercept him as he passed the gate, but remembered in time what the toon would say if she were seen running after the young minister of Sandwick. So she stood sadly watching him from the gate as he hurried across the valley with the sun shining on the flies he had forgotten to remove from his cap.

It seemed to her that but a moment or two passed before her heart gave a great leap to see him come out of the house again and begin slowly to climb the hill. He did not once glance her way,

but when he stooped to gather up his possessions he found her by his side, with Gardie as a screen between them and the rest of the toon.

"What is it?" she asked piteously.

He turned his face towards her and shook his head. As his mouth relaxed, she saw drops of blood on the under lip where it had been bitten. Without a word he continued his way up the hill.

Joan slipped to the end of the wall, and sent a swift glance down at the toon. The black line of men was just beginning to file out of Jimmy's house — that would be Terval first, carrying the wee thing in his arms. For a few moments the eyes of all the women would be bent upon that procession, until it had entered the kirkyard. All in a flame of daring, Joan turned and sped like a shadow up the hill.

It was rough work scrambling through heather and through puddles, for she took no heed where she was going. And even as she climbed, her cheeks burned with the thought of the shame that would come upon her if she had been seen.

She found the man sitting on a bank of heath just over the crest, digging the end of his rod into the bare red earth.

She hurried up to him, at once panting and hesitating, trying with a little nervous laugh to sort

her loosened hair. She stood before him some time, but he did not see or heed her until she began: "I came to — to " —

Then he started and got to his feet, and when he had raised his cap did not put it back upon his head, but flung it upon the ground, and brushed the sweat from his brow.

"I am sorry " — she began again.

"That I 'm done for? So am I. So much for good intentions."

"But what is it that has happened?"

"Go home, Joan, or the neighbors will be talking of you."

"I dona mind. Tell me!"

"You dona mind?" he repeated more quietly. "But it won't do, you know. And what 's the use of telling you, when the mischief 's done?"

"None," she answered, turning slowly away; "none whatever."

Perhaps he heard the sob that she choked back, for he presently called her name.

She half turned and looked at him.

"Come here."

And her face was suddenly glad.

"Say that you 're sorry; say it again, as you said it a while ago."

"I 'm sorry — very sorry!"

"Bless you, child, I believe you are! Sorry that I've been a fool!"

"It doesna matter; I'm just sorry!"

"So am I — as I said before; but it does n't help. I meant it for the best. Come, put your hand on my head, and feel how hot it is."

Timidly she stretched up her finger-tips, and the instinct to comfort swept her away like a tide. "Sit you down here on the bank," she cooed. "Have you any headache? Let me see! Let me see!"

She knelt by him, with her soft fingers brushing away the hair from his temples, and striving to soothe the heavy beating of the pulse.

He yielded for a time, but presently roused himself to say, "They 'll be gone to the kirkyard by now. Make haste, lass, and go down. Some of the neighbors will be coming this way."

"I dona mind at all," she cried gayly; and carried away by a sudden impulse, stooped and touched the frown on his forehead with a butterfly kiss.

He caught her hands and held them close to his shut eyes. "Don't tempt me, Joan; I'm down now, and near desperate!"

"I was only trying to drive away — the lines," she explained in her childish voice.

At this he smiled. "Well, go down now into the toon, and hear what all the old women say about me. Then if you still take my part, or see any good in me at all, come to — where will there be no prying eyes? I have it — the brig o' Laxaburn! Come to-morrow — at sunset — will you?"

"But will you no tell me first what happened to-day — to make you angry?"

"I want you to hear it from them — from the others first," he insisted, "and then if you have any faith in me left, you can show it by coming — will you?"

"It 's haunted," she faltered.

"I know. That 's why I chose it. Nobody 'll be going there at that time. Are you afraid?"

"You would be there," she answered sweetly.

"Then you will?"

"I don't know — perhaps."

Thereupon she disappeared over the crest of the hill almost as suddenly as she had appeared. He reflected that Joan in her ways showed kinship to the fairies. He could imagine her as the little Blue Lady of Vatster Knoll, coming out of the ground, and calling with a flash of eyes and teeth the never-to-be-interpreted "*Tut-koll-tut-koll-munny-koll-onde!*" and vanishing before a man could be sure of

her. But his own troubles speedily absorbed and blotted out the image of Joan.

She walked away, slowly enough after she had passed the brow of the hill; and without turning aside to enter Osla's house, came out upon the main road near her home, where she suddenly found the eyes of two neighbors bent upon her.

"Where 've you been, Joan?" asked old Sweeti, clutching the girl's arm that she might not escape.

Then Joan looked her straight in the face, and said so quietly that even Laura Manson did not suspect anything: "I was up on the hill watching the funeral."

"Did you hear about the two ministers?" asked Laura, eager to spread the news.

"Na," said Joan, "tell me."

"It 's awful; it 's blasphemous, I 'm thinkin'! Mester Keith was in the house — your own father's house, you ken — is you ever heard the like, Sweeti?"

The old woman shook her head.

"Aw, well, it was lame Tommy told me — he wasna able to walk to the kirkyard. He said that Mester Keith was just on the point of beginning the service when Mester Murray walked in, his face all hot and red, and himself dressed for the fishing."

Joan shut her lips very tight.

"And Mester Keith looked at him, surprised-like, and all the men waited to see what they would do. And Mester Keith seemed as if he didna ken what to say, with the men all glowerin' as if they expected something of him, when all at once Mester Murray just stepped up to him, afore them all, and said, holding out his hand, that on this solemn occasion he thought perhaps he might take the opportunity of being publicly reconciled with his brother."

Joan longed to cry, "How splendid!" but restrained herself, and only asked in an eager tone, "And did Mester Keith no take his hand?"

"Lass, lass!" put in Sweeti, "it wasna the time nor the place for such-like!"

"And so Mester Keith told him," completed Laura.

"Maybe" — began the girl with hot cheeks; but thought better of it, and bit her tongue to keep the angry words in.

"I dona ken a deal about such things," continued Laura thoughtfully, "but I doubt it will cost him his place. Mester Keith is as gentle as a fortnight-old lamb, but when he 's once roused he 'll stop at nothing. Think o' 't, with the bairnie all the while lyin' in her wee coffin. Aye, aye, he 'll

surely have to leave — good as he is at the speaking. Well, Joan, — where 's the lass gone to so quick? She 's a queer creature — yon; I doubt she 's a bit daft. Here comes Inga. Maybe she 'll have heard something more. It 's a fair disgrace — this fallin' out of the ministers!"

"But Mester Keith" —

"Yea, yea, Mester Keith" —

The voices of the gossips died away in the distance, and Joan walked homewards with drooping head, just as the men began to come out of the kirkyard. At her own gate she paused and looked up the bare hill.

"I think you were in the right o' the matter!" she murmured defiantly.

CHAPTER XV

WHY BARBIE CAME

THE harvest was fully ripe, but a heavy rain driven by the east wind was beating it to the earth the day that Barbie, sitting in Osla's armchair by the fireside, announced that she was going to begin to work.

Osla had cast many an anxious look upon her crop of oats; but at the last resigned herself to an afternoon in the fresh, sky-blue kitchen. Thinking that Barbie was asleep, she brought out her spinning, and for a long time there was no sound in the room except the flicker of the fire and the whirr of the wheel.

"Where 's Christy?" asked Barbie suddenly.

"While you were asleep Joan came and took him over to play with Lizzie. The bairn 's pinin' again. I put a big hap about him, and Joan said she would carry him all the way."

"It doesna matter," said Barbie. "He 's strong — like me — is he no?"

"That he is — but his eyes are like Terval's."

"His father never could stand it to get wet; but

I 'm hoping Christy will be a stout man like father and Terval " —

" And Eric," Osla concluded softly.

" I 've been thinking, Osla, maybe I could begin to help you a bit with the spinning. I canna sit here always with folded hands."

" Try then," says Osla, pushing the wheel towards her, " while I make our tea."

Barbie took the snuid timidly at first. " Maybe I 'm forgotten how. I always liked better to be out on the hills."

But when the wheel began to whirl and purr softly as she pressed the treadle — " humming like a lintie," Osla said — and as the delicate, oily wool began to slip like a thin trail of smoke through her fingers, as she felt the pull and twist of the smoothly twining yarn, a touch of color and a half smile came to Barbie's face, until presently the snuid tangled and broke, and the spinner lay back in her chair exhausted.

" You shall tell me all about London, Barbie," said Osla cheerfully, " while I make pancakes for your tea."

" I don't want " — began Barbie.

" You won't eat bread or biscuits or oatcakes or scones. Indeed, it must be pancakes then. What likena place is London ? "

"What think you?" asked Barbie drearily.

"I think it 's like Lerwick" — no further south than this had Osla been — "but big enough maybe to cover this whole island with houses."

"Two or three like it," said Barbie. "But it 's not like Lerwick. You don't climb steps to get from one street to another, and there 's no houses built out in the water. And you might walk in it all day long and never meet a neighbor or see anything but long, straight lines of houses."

"I 'm no wantin' to go there," observed Osla, with a quiet smile.

"There 's just the one thing that I miss here at home, and that 's the trees in the parks."

"I 'm seen trees," interrupted Osla. "There 's some by the road that Terval dug out of the peat on Vallafield in the spring. He said they were maybe a thousand year old — I dona ken."

"Ah, but they 're different when they have their leaves on — leaves and blossoms."

"But dona they shut out the sun?"

"Sometimes; but in London they keep us from aye looking at the houses."

"Are they no like the willows in Mester Donaldson's garden?"

"Why, those are no bigger than Christy, and all burnt black with the sea-winds. Na, yonder they

are twice as high as the mast of a fishing-boat, and in the spring covered with white blossoms, and pink. It 's beautiful there, in the country, surely; but in the city the smoke gets all about the heart until you feel fair smothered. Sometimes, before baby came, Christy and I used to run away to the sea."

"Was it no far?"

"Not so far by train; but ye 'll hardly ken what a train 's like, Osla."

"I 'm seen pictures of them, and that 's quite enough," laughed Osla. "But is the folk so different from ourselves?"

"I can scarce tell sometimes whether they mean what they 're saying. And their living away from the sea makes them all different — I cannot tell just exactly how. It was that was the matter between me and — and him."

Osla looked up from the hearth where she was kneeling to bake her pancakes, but found no words for the question in her eyes.

"You see, it was this way," said Barbie, leaning forward with her face in her hands. "It was for my looks that he loved me first, and when we came to go South to his mother — it was — all different. It wasna that she was unkind, but she thought I wasna so fine a lady as herself — and maybe I was proud too."

"No doubt," commented Osla.

"But she was aye trying to make me talk the right English and wear gloves. I dona blame her, but I could never be doing what I pleased, and as for going barefoot — even in the house — I couldna dream of it. And all the years that I was trying my best to please them — to be a good wife to him — I couldna help feeling that it was just God's judgment upon me for running away to my pleasure when I should have stayed at home with mother and Terval. I was fair sick at heart, Osla, when I found that he didna care for me so much — in the old way — and I would have come home then, but I thought it a shame for a woman to leave her husband lightly."

"So it would be," said Osla at once. "Then how did ye come at the last?"

"It was through Peter Wilson," she answered slowly, "little as he intended it — poor body! I was alone when they told me he was at the door, and I couldna help being glad to see him. He told me about you all until my heart fair ached with homesickness, and then I had just brought the bairnies in for him to see, when *she* came in." . . .

"Well?"

"It wasna that she said much — not even when he told how he was come to London to see his

daughter that was in service, but I knew — oh, I knew very well."

"But what of it?" queried Osla, manifestly puzzled.

"You dona understand such things," Barbie told her. "When she spoke her thought, after he was gone, I could only shut my lips. But she came in again, just as I was trying to coax Christy, — he was in an ill mood that night. I can see her yet as she set her foot on the fender and said in — her way, that she wished me to spare her meeting servants in her own drawing-room. I couldna speak, Osla, for the dryness in my throat; I just stood and glowered at her pretty beaded slipper, and could think of nothing but how my feet used to be at home, all brown and bare or in my working boots. And something in me said, 'Ye are all different, Barbie; ye dona belong here among these people.'"

"What did you say to them?" asked Osla gravely.

"I looked at him, thinking he might perhaps say something for me, but he just read on in his book; and I said, 'I never introduced you to any but my friends.' That night I made up my mind to come home — perhaps it was what Peter was telling me — to them that needed me and wanted me more as my own husband."

"But will he come for ye here?"

Barbie laughed faintly. "Not he. I lied to him — as people sometimes do in the South — only he would never believe that I could have learned such a thing. Aye, I lied to him; he 'll go anywhere else before he comes to Shetland. Perhaps it was for that God punished me by taking my baby, — I dona ken. — There 's but one thing for me to do as soon as I 'm quite well again — and that 's to make it up to Terval — and mam — my going away — as well as I can."

"What would ye do?" asked Osla eagerly.

"Many a night I lay awake thinking how it must be, and though she shut me out on that first night, and I canna forget what that meant for my bairnie, I will go back and let Terval be free." . . .

"Lass, lass," said Osla, with a tender smile, "as if I had not tried to do that very thing myself. It 's near half a score of years since I spoke of it to him, and after Wullie went away South I urged it again; and just now — that Nenie 's like to go and for other reasons. Lass, he will not hear to it."

"And why no?"

"Can ye no think?" asked Osla; and Barbie flushed as she answered: —

"The more shame to me for going, then; and yet ten years ago she hardly touched" —

Osla shook her head sadly.

After a silence, Barbie resumed. "But we could manage together, you and I, Osla. You will help me to make it right — even against Terval's will? With the croft — we could rent that; and with the garden and what we could make by our spinning and knitting" —

"We could make do very well," said Osla, with energy, "and we 'll just have another try with an obstinate man."

"Hsh," said Barbie, "he 's coming."

CHAPTER XVI

THE WILL OF GOD

TERVAL came in very wet, hanging his oilskin coat and sou'wester in the entry.

"How are ye, the day?" he asked rather absently, rumpling his light hair about his forehead, as he always did when perplexed.

"The better for seeing you," said Osla politely, going to the cupboard for another cup and saucer; but he looked at his sister.

"I 'm fine," she answered. "What brought you here on such a day?"

"I 'm had my tea, Osla," he protested, as she began to pour out for him.

"Another 'll do no harm after all this wet."

He could not well refuse after that, and nothing more was said while he drank. Osla took up her knitting, and Barbie reached for the wheel again and began to spin, though both uncertainly and unevenly, perhaps with the desire to show him that she was nearly well.

He watched her as he drank his tea, and setting down his cup, remarked: —

"You 're doing that very badly."

She began some protest or apology, but he scarcely listened, continuing almost at once, "It 's a pity for a man to have to walk a mile in the rain to speak to his own sister."

This was coming to the point at once. Barbie's wheel stopped, and Osla looked up from her knitting with bright, watchful eyes.

"You 'll better be at home," he observed, without looking at Barbie.

To the surprise of both, Barbie broke into shrill laughter, and suddenly checked it. "Aye," she said.

"Surely," he answered, "it 's no matter for laughing about, lass."

"I was laughing at my own thoughts, Terval; and ye canna for the world guess what they are."

He paid but scant attention to this. "You canna bide here with Osla."

"That she can," was the quick retort, "if so is best."

Barbie looked at Osla, and seeing that she could not speak, timidly unfolded their plan for the homestead.

He listened in silence, but with a kindling glance; and for some moments after she had done speaking, remained motionless but illuminated. But at last

he shook aside the golden dreams and said quietly, "Na, na, ye canna manage — ye two alone. Besides" —

"Christy will soon be big enough to help," said Barbie, with a sort of fierce pride.

"No doubt, no doubt; but yet — it will be better for me to bide at home as well."

"But why, then?" she persisted.

"Just because — I 'm no so sure — that ye two could manage so — very well together."

"There 's Osla," began Barbie.

"But ye wouldna be laying the burden of it on Osla?"

Barbie was silent a moment, then said, "I will try to forgive her, Terval; but ye ken I canna just at once forget my wee bairnie."

"Na, na," interposed Osla, "but it will be better, my lass, to take that as the will o' God, the same that 's keepin' my man from me — aye, the will o' God."

Barbie looked from one to the other, saying at last, "And if she willna have me, Osla, may I bide here?"

"Surely, lass, surely."

"In a few days, Terval, as soon as I am free of this cough, I shall be coming home; and then if ye dona go when you may, it must be of your own will."

But the words that echoed in his mind as he looked at her, not answering, were: "The will o' God."

A sudden brightness at the window attracted his notice. He went to the door and found that the rain had ceased and bright fragments of a triple rainbow were arched over Framgord.

As he looked across the ruffled voe he was seized with the strong desire to bring the two of them together; perhaps Barbie's plan was not so altogether wild as it seemed. If he went to Edinburgh for a while and got something to do, he could surely send them money.

He told the women briefly that he was going to fetch his mother, and scarcely giving them time to reply, tramped out into the wet, pebbly road on his errand of reconciliation.

Brief work he made of it at Framgord: "Mother, I 'm coming to take thee to Barbie."

She looked vaguely alarmed, and did not seem to know what to say.

"Put on thy hap," he insisted firmly, but not ungently.

She reached for it without a word, but perhaps the dumb fear in her eyes pleaded for her better than speech.

"It 's no too far for thee, the day?" he asked.

She shook her head, demanding in turn, "She 's no worse?"

"Na, na, but I 'm thinkin' it will be better for both of ye to be at peace."

At this she hung back. "Terval, what am I to say to her?"

"Doesna your own heart tell you, mother?"

Whatever she may have felt, she showed no further outward sign of misgiving, but walked with him in silence down to Gardie.

As they entered, Osla slipped away ben, where Nenie sat already, sewing perhaps a little, but dreaming more.

There was nothing said at first. Barbie looked up stonily into the old woman's face and seemed unaware of the gnarled gray hand laid on her sleeve. Then the mother gave a cry and laid her head on the daughter's knee, sobbing, "My bairn! my bairn!"

And Barbie, without moving or seeming to see her, looked wide-eyed at Terval. "*My* bairn!" she whispered, and after a moment, "I canna — yet."

He looked at her sorrowfully, then crossed the room and lifted his mother. She clung to him, sobbing, while he turned to Barbie: "You said you would forgive?"

This seemed to rouse her a little. She looked

up as if about to speak, but broke into a sudden cough that was not for a while to be resisted, and left her exhausted.

As soon as she could she went over to the old woman where Terval had placed her by the fire.

"Mother," she cried, in a gentle but cold voice, and not so much as putting out a kind hand, "would ye have me at home?"

She had no answer to that; the old woman seemed to be suppressing her sobs in her apron.

"Oh, why did she turn me away in the night?"

But at the appealing upward glance the hard mood melted, and she knelt and clasped her mother's neck.

"I 'll come home, mother, if ye will; I 'll believe ye didna mean it — couldna help it."

After that she was much worse, so that Terval, full of remorse for his experiment, went hastily to fetch the doctor.

And when the little man, after making them all merry, went away, promising to send soothing medicines, Terval walked a few paces down the road with him to ask whether much was the matter.

"We shall see," he said curtly. "Don't worry yet."

"Will she be better soon?" demanded Terval.

"Don't think you can make me commit myself,"

said the doctor. "If I give you a name as a handle, you 'll go and read it up in one of your science books, you see. And then you 'll just know enough to get your mind into a pretty mess about the whole matter."

"I want a plain answer to a plain question," said Terval.

"Well, my man, what do you expect after such a night's exposure, and worry and anxiety and the loss of her child and the devil knows what else?"

"That means 'No,'" began Terval slowly.

"Save your deductions for other occasions," said Cochrane, with a touch of impatience, "and be satisfied to do the best you can and await developments."

"Dr. Cochrane," said Terval, "do you always speak the truth?"

"Always, my good friend, always — as much as my profession allows."

"Then — you think she will be better?"

"Undoubtedly." The doctor had a way of hiding behind his spectacles at critical moments. "I 'll just look in again to-morrow on my way up to the Manse. Don't move her for the present. Mrs. Keith 's got a cold. Demmed wet weather, eh? Ruins crops, ruins tempers. Good-night to ye — good-night."

Terval understood well enough the meaning of the doctor's cheeriness, and turned back with a deeper chill of sadness upon him to the house.

They had put Barbie to bed again, and were endeavoring to minister to her in the fond way that women have when everything has been done. But his mother, as soon as she saw him, came away and seized him by the arm near the door.

"What 's this?" she croaked in an excited whisper, "Barbie tells me you 're going away?"

"It 's only a dream of hers, mother," he said, smiling down upon her steadfastly.

"And ye 'll no go?"

"Na, na."

"I couldna spare ye, Terval, indeed," she continued.

"Aw, well, we 'll no talk of it."

"But ye 're no thinking of it — surely?"

"I have no intention of going," he said, "none."

And Osla's words repeated themselves in his brain: "The will o' God! — the will o' God!" all the while that he was amusing wee Christy, who had been brought home tired and fretful, with ships fashioned out of the blades of wide green rushes; and it was the echo of these words that he heard as he and his mother tramped their homeward road together.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GHOSTS OF THE LAXABURN

In all that lonely island there is no more lonely spot than the brig of Laxaburn. A rough road passes the hill at the head of the voe and dips sharply into a narrow ravine, at the bottom of which lies the brig; thence climbs a yet steeper ascent and stops short among the moorlands. The stream winds its way between low hills covered with heather and moss and turf, dotted with grazing sheep. In summer the vale is a glory of greens, ranging from the delicate tints of young grass, through the emerald of wet mosses, to the deep olive of the ling; and later the green is veiled with rosy heather, purple in the shadows; and in the heart of the valley is the clear amber of the burn, with the glint of liquid gold where it tumbles over stones in the sunshine. But on a gray, rain-foreboding twilight of early autumn, it was barren and dreary. The greens were all crushed into one dead color, the heath was turned rusty, the heather almost gone, the burn black and swollen, and roaring in a torrent down the long, slanting rock below the

bridge. "The road to Nowhere" was Joan's name for it; and along this lonely way she went trysting for five successive nights after her promise; but not until the sixth did she reach the brig of Laxaburn.

Even then her courage all but failed her; she panted, not from the climb alone, and stumbled over the stones, all a-thrill with nervous excitement, touched with fear, for try as she would she could not forget the ghosts that haunt the place.

The sudden cry of a far-away lamb set her running, and she did not slacken her pace until she reached the crest of the hill and saw at the brig him whom, against all hope, she had hoped to find.

He was leaning over the rickety wooden rail of the bridge, with his back to her, and did not turn at the sound of the faltering footsteps that grew slower as they advanced. But at length a pinch of anger made her bold, and she stepped up behind him and laid her hands over his eyes.

"I hoped you would do that," he said. "I was waiting for it; I wanted the touch of your kind little fingers, Joan."

She drew back at once. "How did you know that I would come?" she asked.

"I did n't," he answered, turning to face her. "I gave you up after the first night; but I came every day, perhaps for the lack of anything better

to do, perhaps hoping against hope. To-night I went farther — to the top of the hill — and saw that you were here at last; so then I came down and waited. I am sick at heart, Joan."

Her dark eyes looked at him softly, but she did not answer.

"I shall be going South in a few weeks — you heard that?"

Her words were indistinct; but he continued at once: "I can't get on with your paragon of a minister; and as he is my chief, I'll have to go — as I expected. I've had it out with him since I saw you."

Joan's eyes showed her heart; but her only thought was, "*Paragon — paragon* — what's a *paragon?*" With a sudden flash of memory she saw herself a little schoolgirl standing in line for the spelling: "*Paroquet — parapet* — yes; but *paragon?*"

Aloud she said quietly, "What will you do, then?"

"Go home and wait. Learn sense if I can, and — train my memory. If I don't get another church, I can work with my hands, I suppose."

He was watching her as he spoke, and saw the sudden flush on her dark, thin face. It seemed to him that she was both surprised and pleased as she

answered, "Many a good man has done that before you. St. Paul was a tentmaker."

To work with his hands as her father did and the other men! He could not know how these words brought him near to her.

As he watched her he lost the troubled look in his eyes, and the lines in his forehead were smoothed away; he was once more the good-natured Scotch boy who had stumbled by chance into a minister's gown.

"You are like a wee trow, Joan," he said admiringly, "with your big glinting eyes and your straight black hair. That minds me, it 's quite the proper place for you to be in — this haunt of the ghosts."

But she looked around with a quick little shiver of fear, and the sudden jump of a sheep on the hillside sent her into the arms that opened and held her close. She drew a corner of his coat over her face and was still.

"Tell me the ghost story, Joan," he said, with a laugh that sounded loud in the solitude. "I never heard it."

"Na, na," she whispered fearfully.

"But yea, yea." He mimicked her speech, and drew the coat away, so that he could look down into her face.

"Are ye no frightened?" she asked, not daring to lift her eyes.

"Look up at me," he said. "Are you — now?"

"Na," she said softly. And as if his words had been a command, she began, while her fingers fumbled at one of his buttonholes, thus: —

"There was a man long ago — who had a sweetheart — who was a witch."

"Like Joan," he interrupted.

"Maybe she wasna bonnie," she continued, with a suddenly wistful look at him.

"Aye, but she was," he answered promptly; "the bonnier for being not like the other lasses."

"I dona ken," she sighed, "but he tired of her and got him another sweetheart."

She paused for his comment, and after a second he murmured with some heat, "Shame fall upon him!"

"He were a fisherman," said Joan, "and one day he went out to the *haaf* — to the deep-sea fishing; it were as fine and clear a day as you would see in seven year, and there was six of them in the boat. They was sailin' along, running free before the wind, when all of a sudden the witch came up behind the boat like a great bull."

"How did they know it was the witch?" asked Murray, with a tinge of skepticism.

"Wait!" she answered fearfully, and cuddled closer. "And she gripped her sweetheart by the shoulder, and tried to pull him overboard, but he was a strong man and she couldna. So she told the others to heave him over" —

"The bull did?"

"Aye, but they wouldna; and she give the boat a push and they was all — drooned!"

Seeing that he looked doubtful, she added, "The bodies come ashore at Burra. I ken the spot. It 's where the sea-horse were seen, the very summer."

"Who saw that?"

"An old man — and a boy. Oh, it 's true! It were as big as the doctor's horse. They would have shot it if they had had a gun. Don't you believe me?"

"Oh, the one 's as true as the other, no doubt," he answered; but as she still seemed to expect him to say something, he added, "Don't you be like that witch, Joan!"

"I dona ken," she answered dreamily.

"Ah, you 're descended from the old Picts — I mind Terval's telling me — and they were a terrible lot. I shall be afraid of you, Joan. Which would you do, kill me or my new sweetheart, if I had another?"

"Myself, maybe," she said softly.

"But you would n't believe that I had another sweetheart," he urged. "You did n't believe the gossip."

"Na, I didna believe that."

"There was none but yourself, Joan, nor will be."

"No in the South, where you 're going?"

"No in the South, where I 'm going."

There was silence between them until he, perceiving that the twilight was gathering close, said, "But where 's your ghost story? You were telling me a ghost story — and now 's just the time."

"Now 's just the time," she repeated, her fear now delicious with the sense of his protection. "When the ghosts appeared to Girzie — that was the second sweetheart, ye ken; she lived over the hill, in yon roofless house, — there was a croft there before it were turned into a sheep farm. And one night as she was comin' home in the twilight, here just where we 're standin', she saw yonder on the brae — it was winter and there was a patch of snow — she saw black against the snow her sweetheart; and he came down the brae and over the burn and stood by her on the brig, and behind him she could see, dimmer-like, shadows — five, and she kenned it were the five that was drooned.

And she telled folk after that she was froze-like with fear till he called her name; and then she put her hands over her ears and ran through the snow and the mud, and aye as she ran she kenned that he were keepin' up with her, — and no sound of his footsteps on the road, — keepin' up with her as easy as easy! She kenned it, though she couldna look; and at last she missed the road and stumbled and fell in a ditch, and he stood over her and looked down upon her with reproach in his een. And the five stood far off; but she saw them all plain. She wouldna tell what he spoke to her; but she said his voice began loud like thunder, then died away so she could scarce hear it. But he made her ken fine that it were the witch that drooned them. Ow, 't is fearsome!" said Joan. "When she came to the door of the house she pushed it in and fell on her face; and so they found her — her clothes wet to the knees, and hersel' in such a state — she never rose from her bed for six months. And that 's what a witch can do!" concluded Joan.

"I 'll never dare to have another sweetheart, after that story, my witch!"

Joan lifted her head suddenly: "I maun go; it 's time to put wee Lizzie to bed."

They turned and began to walk slowly to the

top of the hill, from which they could look down upon the first lights of the toon.

"Why did n't you come the first day?" he asked presently.

"I was frighted," was her timid answer. "I came part of the way — each night — and the nearer I got, the more something was pullin' me back, until at last I couldna go a step further. But each time I got a wee bit nearer, until to-night — aw, na, I wasna afraid o' the ghosts — so much; I was afraid of — of — of — I dona ken."

"Then you 'll come another time?" he asked eagerly. "I 'm going so soon."

"Yea," she said, adding with some doubt, "Father 'll no be over-pleased to hear that I 'm got a sweetheart."

There was something on his lips to be said, but he was slow to bring it out, and even then stumbled over it: —

"Considering my present position, Joan, and — and — and — my first difficulty with Mr. Keith, it might be best not to tell him till I 'm settled again and can either come or send."

"Weel," she said simply.

They stood some little time at the top of the hill. To the eastward of the voe there was a faint point of light at Framgord, and at the west a broad ray

streamed from the Manse, and between these two star after star of the home-lamps began to twinkle out among the dimly outlined houses.

Joan cast a fearful look back towards the valley of the ghosts; then put his broad shoulder between herself and them, and clutching his hand, said: —

"Du — du will be true to me?"

"Can du — du doubt it — after that tale?"

And the way home seemed to her short indeed, for he filled it with sweet words; and she believed them all — as perhaps did he.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TESTING OF TERVAL

It was in the time of the harvest moon, Barbie not yet come home to Framgord, that Terval one evening walked the round of the voe to the Manse. He was stiff with scythe-work; but there was that in his heart would not let him rest.

In the kitchen at Gardie he found only Nenie writing a letter. She hurriedly covered it, as if fearful that he might divine its contents, and told him in obvious haste to be rid of him that Barbie was asleep and Osla not come in from the milking.

He went out then and found her on the hill-slope above the byre. She was standing with one hand on the shoulder of her patient cow, both black and motionless against the vast white disk of the moon scarce risen above the crest of the uplands behind them. Terval was minded to go away in silence, for he knew that her heart was seaward.

But she came down with a quiet greeting, and when she had set her pail on the grass and led the cow into the byre she told him the reason of Nenie's

shy, fluttering spirits: Charlie was doing well enough to come for her in the winter.

"What will you do then, woman?" asked Terval gently.

She looked away from him at the voe, which was here pale, dull, and without ripple; then across at the point where a single star showed Framgord. From the sands there a broad path of silver would be trailing out into the open sea.

"Dona laugh," she said at last, with something of painful effort in her undertone. "He 'm comin' nearer to me, day and night. It 's same as a tether pullin' me down to the banks at the Birrier. I can scarce work for it. Whiles, when I 'm away on the far hills after the lambs or the ponies, I hear it as plain as I hear thee to-night; and whiles, a blindness-like comes over me and I look up to find myself on the sands seekin' — I dona ken what."

"So," he answered, wondering but not doubting.

"What think you, Terval?"

"It 's what the old women call the second-sight."

"So they would," she interrupted eagerly.

"But it 's against all reason," he continued imperturbably.

He could not see her smile of scornful disbelief;

but to her his perplexity was clear as he threaded the strands of his great beard, now silvered in the moonlight. Yet his first words amazed her greatly.

"There 's a good few," he began awkwardly, "that says it 's right for a widow woman to marry again."

"What think you?" she asked quickly.

"No bein' a widow woman," — he smiled broadly, — "I canna say."

"And so I tell them," she took him up with much earnestness.

"I was thinkin' for you — when Nenie 's gone"— He had heard something of the rumors about Jimmy Robertson.

"When I was a peerie lass" — her voice became a monotonous undertone, almost a chant—"grandad used to tell me about they old Norsewomen that died with their men. If I heard *he* was gone — I should like fine to do the same — far as might be, considerin' the laws o' God. But if I couldna I 'm no carin' for another man."

Terval broke the silence between them: "Ye may be right, Osla; but when you 're left alone?"

"Eric wouldna be vexed," she pleaded, "if he was to find me at Framgord in thy place."

He shook his head.

"Man, man," she entreated him.

"I ken thy thought," he said at last, "but — Barbie 's none the better."

"You 're surely wrong, Terval. It was a terrible night; but she was aye a strong lass."

"She 's lived in the South," he answered moodily.

Yet Osla tried again: "Can you no see, Terval, that I 'm needin' some one to be with? I 'm no one o' them that can live with idle hands and an empty heart."

He shook his head again, with the patience of an obstinate man: "I canna leave them both yet; but you 're welcome at Framgord for all that."

Her clasped hands fell apart with the gesture of one who throws something away. "Ye 'll find — one of this days," she said sorrowfully, "that your life 's all behind you, Terval."

"Weel, then?" His obstinacy was become defiance.

"It 's a pity ye should be wasted — you that could do other things — carin' for an old woman and a sick lass."

He did not find speech at once, and she continued eagerly, "Things I could do same 's yourself — same 's yourself, Terval."

And still he was silent with bent head.

"What say you, Terval?" she ventured timidly, at last.

"I must be on my way to the Manse," he said, with something of a sigh.

"And have you no other word, Terval?"

He shook his head a third time.

She laid her thin dark hand on his sleeve. "Tell me this," she said. "If the end of your days was to come, swift and quiet like this, what then?"

"I could do nothing else," was all he would say.

"It 's no that I think you would have fear of it; I ken fine that there 's no fear in your heart. But you have your dreams like another, man; and if you willna take the things that comes your way" —

"Wait — wait," he interposed. "I must take my chance like another. We 're a long-lived race — I 'm scarce at the middle yet."

"And if you should be cut off in the middle?"

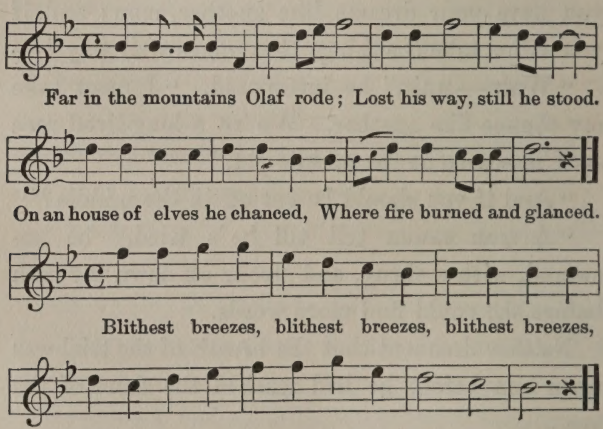
"A man canna tell till he 's tried," he answered, with a shrug, and strode off down the path before she could find more words.

Neither dreamed that the breath of the trial was upon him before he had reached the shore of the voe.

Where the path turned into the road Terval paused and looked behind him; the hills were half as if snowed over with moonlight, half in deep shadow starred over with home-lights. As he stood there a faint haze overspread the cloudless sky and

the waveless voe, and vanished almost before he could rub his eyes.

But there was a sensation as of cloud in his brain — a confused feeling of anxiety, of dread, of vague and strange discomfort. He turned along the seaward road towards the Manse, whistling as he went the tune of an old fairy song that he had sounded between the midnight and the dawn across many a lonely moorland. Presently the words came, and he sang in the Norn something like this: —


Far in the mountains Olaf rode; Lost his way, still he stood.
On an house of elves he chanced, Where fire burned and glanced.
Blithest breezes, blithest breezes, blithest breezes,
blithest breezes, breezes sped the hills a - mong.

Hevdigarth, Saxavord, the Muckle Heog, where the "little people" live — black — black as the darkness of death. Yonder wall was the kirkyard, surely. The moon, though cloudless, looked

strangely veiled, and the light had become dim and ghostly. Terval hummed more briskly : —

" An elfin maid to meet him trod ;
She was nowise dear to God.
Another came a-tripping down,
In her hand a silver crown.
Blithest breezes, etc."

He was close by the wall now, wondering that the moonlight should have faded so that tombstones and ruined kirk alike should be mere dark blotches against the dull sky. And still the moon rode high and clear, though faint, as if her own reflection.

It was not that they feared death — those Viking ancestors that lay on the sunny slope south of the kirk, under their rudely carven stone boats and broken crosses — not that they feared death, for the sure hope of Valhalla was in them, if they died like men. But yet who among them all would have dared to stand by the wall and hum an elfin song?

" Straightway followed yet a third,
With a golden band her waist did gird.
When the fourth maid came out there,
With kindly words she spoke him fair.
Blithest breezes, etc.

" ' Welcome, Olaf Liljaros,
Come into the rock and dwell with us.'
' I will not with elves abide ;
I will in the Lord confide.'
Blithest breezes, etc.

"'Though thou dost with elves abide,
Mayest in the Lord confide!'
Then to a treasure-chest she passed,
A mantle on her shoulders cast.
Blithest breezes, etc."

The moon had gone out as utterly as if the end of the world had come, and in its stead was a dark blotch upon the sky.

A sudden chill swept through Terval as he turned back to the road. Were the elves indeed working spells, or was he suddenly gone mad? The road darkened — all but vanished — under his feet; the hills and voe lay without a sound, but removed an immeasurable distance. Once or twice he rubbed his forehead and eyes, then out of sheer defiance broke into loud song: —

"Then stepped she to her treasure-hoard,
And grippèd up a full bright sword.
'Never henceward shalt thou fare,
Till thou have a kiss to spare.'
Blithest breezes, etc.

"Olaf bent from his saddle-bow,
Chose a maid from the elfin row;
In his side the sharp sword bit,
But wounded never a whit.
Blithest breezes, etc."

He was staggering — stumbling — gasping. He stretched out his hands to save himself, his foot went into the dry ditch and he came up panting

hard against a bank. As he leaned there in the thick darkness, he remembered that his grandfather had died of a stroke, and his father — was it like this?

A moment he sat passively waiting; then with a sudden chill of the marrow and beading of sweat on the brow, there swept over him a memory of those that needed him at home, of those he had refused to leave.

He set his jaw and rose grim with the intent to fight death itself for their sakes. A moment he swayed in the vast uncertainty of the darkness round about, then step by step groped his way down the hillside until he heard the ripple of the burn. There he paused at the end of the narrow sandbar between the loch and the voe. The Manse would be on the top of the hill facing him, he knew, but he had first to cross the swift-running burn, spanned only by three great beams of a wrecked ship.

It seemed to him that if he could only hold out — could manage some way to get across — the demon of darkness would leave him. It was unreasonable, but he had ceased to reason. As he was feeling about for the bridge, he knew by a tramping, creaking sound that some one was crossing from the other side. He started back slightly and ran

against the keel of an old fishing-boat beached there. Flinging his arm across the near gunwale, with the intent of hiding his state from the approaching unknown, he continued his song, clearly enough, although a little harshly: —

"Olaf drove his horse with spur
Till he came to his mother's door.
At the lock then gan he shake,
'Look up, mother mine, awake!
Blithest breezes, etc.

"'Oh, why art thou wan and pale,
As though the elves had wrought thee bale?'"

The footsteps were very near now, on the gravel; and the creaking of the beams had ceased.

"'Mother, let me rest a stound,
Sister, bind my mortal wound.'
Blithest breezes, etc."

"That 's a fine night, Terval," said a familiar voice — Davie Brown's. Terval remembered that he was courting Tamar Clarke, who kept house at the Manse.

"It is that.

"Olaf lay there hours three;
Even as dead man seemèd he."

"Do you think yon 's a weatherhead?" asked Davie.

Terval turned his face away from the moonlight

towards the sea-breeze. "I canna tell," said he, and hummed, —

> "A little while he lay in dole;
> Then Young Olaf yielded his soul.
> My prayers I bring unto the cross;
> Sancta Maria, be with us!"

"Yon 's a queer song, I 'm thinkin'," pursued Davie. Did the man suspect?

"Aye, aye," said Terval. "An old song. I must be on my way to the Manse. Is it just so bright as it was, Davie, think you?"

"Brighter, man. Look at the silver on yon loch."

But Terval stood with bent head until Davie had passed over the hill behind him. Then he groped his way to the edge of the burn, and kneeling on the central beam that sprang up and down beneath his weight, he crawled across to the grassy slope on the further side. It was just as he was getting to his feet again that he fancied the darkness of the night was less black. He waited, straining his eyes backwards until the kirk and then the kirkyard emerged slowly out of the blackness, and beyond them the dear familiar toon. He glanced down at the pouring burn below and wondered that he could see the broken streak of light that ran back into the sparkling loch. Above him towered the white

Manse with a broad yellow path from the study lamp as always.

"The Valley of the Shadow!" was Terval's thought as he looked about him in silent wonder. And instinctively he turned back to the kirk, which he had passed in the thickest blackness. Now he could see the carven monuments of the ancient lords of the manor standing high above the roofless walls, and on the seaward slope the mounds of the humbler folk who had slept there longer than man could remember, who would lie there yet only a little while until one day the waves would crush the wall that bound them and wash their bones away to lie with their beloved that they had lost in the deep. And the kirk itself, with its stately memorials and ancient broken crosses, would be under the tide with the older kirk that the sands disclosed but faintly in the spring neap.

"The Valley of the Shadow!" — and by some strange enchantment he had come through. But the thought of the returning chilled him, and, with his hand already on the Manse gate, he turned sharply and tramped down and across the burn and up the hill-slope to the kirk. It might be trows or it might be a thing the doctor could name that had bewitched him. Whatever it was, he waited there and defied it to come forth to the grapple.

When the night continued white and serene, his defiance was turned into a great peace. Once more he resumed his journey, as before, — but in how different a mood, — still heralding his approach with the old-time strain, —

"Blithest breezes sped the hills among."

CHAPTER XIX

TEMPTATION AT THE MANSE

TERVAL found the minister alone in his study, and met with a good welcome.

"I 'm come to speak about Mester Murray," he began abruptly.

"Well, then?" said Keith, turning his face away so that Terval looked at the sharply cut, thin profile.

"He 's going South?"

"The matter is n't quite settled," said the minister, still staring into the fire.

"But you would like him to go?"

"I think it best — on the whole."

"But — has it to do with his action the day the bairn was buried?" asked Terval anxiously.

"Something, of course."

"Do ye know all the facts of the case, sir?"

"Well, what, for instance?" said Keith, looking at Terval now and smiling a little.

"Aw — just that he wasna meaning any disrespect when he come" —

"I know that — anything else?"

"I dona believe the talk about his goin' on wi' the lasses."

"I don't suppose there 's much in it," admitted Keith. "Still — Well, since you have brought up the matter, I may as well be frank. The young fellow is honest enough and means well, no doubt; but he 's stiffnecked, and having begun badly with me, he 'll go on in the same way. He 'll like it better transferred back to Scotland, so I 'm doing him a kindness under color of a piece of spite — as the toon may think."

"You mean the gossip?" began Terval.

"Yes, it 's come back to me; it 's all over the island, is n't it, that I 'm a brute of a husband?"

"I have heard very little of it," said Terval curtly.

At that moment the study door opened and Mrs. Keith peeped in. "Oh, busy?" she asked. "I 'm going to bed."

"Has Tamar put on a good fire upstairs?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered peevishly. "I hope so, I 'm sure."

"Come in a moment, while I go up and see," he said, starting to his feet.

She went over to the fire and sat down facing Terval, with her thin, white, jeweled hand raised to cover a succession of small yawns.

Terval studied in silence her slender, beautiful foot with its expensive, buckled slipper; and for a while she did not incline to speak.

Presently, as she seemed to have forgotten him, he ventured to study her face, thin, sallow, and discontented, but with bright blue eyes and pretty yellow hair, unduly curled.

"What are you thinking of when you stare at me, Terval?" she asked finally.

"I was looking for signs of your Norse ancestors."

"Well, do you find them?" she asked, without much interest.

"There 's something in the high set of the features, the curve of the nostril, the poise of the head" —

"So far as I know, I have no Norse ancestors," she cried, with an air of triumph.

"But you are too slenderly built to be the mother of heroes," he concluded imperturbably.

She flushed with displeasure or embarrassment, and retorted that she was quite certainly pure English.

Terval shook his head. "The strain might be a thousand years old," he said, "but it 's there, as unmistakable as the blue of your eyes."

"I believe you would rather be a Norseman than a king, Terval," she said.

"Well, it comes to much the same thing," he said, with a slow smile. "My fathers were kings over twenty acres, and now though it 's only five, it 's just as free, and shall never be bought for sheep-farming or any other purpose while I live."

"And after?" she asked pertly.

He shrugged.

"Ah, well, you should marry, you see," she admonished him.

He shook his head in silence.

"Why not?"

"I shall never find the woman."

"But this is interesting!" She had stopped yawning now. "Tell me; what should she be like?"

For a moment Terval seemed reluctant to speak; then he said quickly, "Like yourself — in some ways."

She laughed rather foolishly, looking both pleased and baffled. "It sounds like a compliment, but coming from you I know it is n't, so I won't ask how she should be different."

He did not think it necessary to answer this, and she continued presently: —

"I have lost whatever good looks I might have had by coming up to this desolate place to live. It 's a terrible change after London. Do you know about

the woman in Pettadale that killed herself last winter? Of course you do. They say it was because she was so lonely. She came from Leeds, I think, and she had been married here only about six months " —

She turned in some confusion at the sound of her husband's step; but his face showed no consciousness of her last words.

" It 's all right now," he said as he came in, " but she had forgotten it. We must put a stop to Davie Brown's coming if it 's going to interfere " —

" Yes, do speak to her about it. It 's such a bother — housekeeping."

When she had gone, Keith said to Terval, " For her sake I wish I could get a church in Edinburgh or even Aberdeen ; but I 'm afraid it 's out of the question — for the present."

" But you would rather be here," Terval could not forbear saying.

" Aye ; but I could be content wherever she 's happy. Speaking of Edinburgh reminds me that I had a thing to say to you. I 've been meditating upon it several days, and it 's ripe now, so you have saved me a trip to Framgord. You know my brother Alec? He has been up here for his holiday several times."

Terval nodded.

"You know, perhaps, that he is an attendant in one of the Edinburgh libraries? Well, he has been looking forward for years to a winter in the South, — he 's a bachelor, you see, — and this winter he has the money. Only, he must find a substitute, as he does n't want another man to get the post permanently. What say you?"

"I?" gasped Terval.

"Yes. It would be an opening, you see; and at the end of the time you would have the experience and some money saved."

"But I know nothing about the work."

"Nonsense — you could learn in a week — it 's largely mechanical — not even cataloguing, and it might lead to something else. Besides, you would like being among books."

Terval sat silent in sheer amazement.

"I thought that if you would consider it, I might let Alec know" —

"But it is out of the question," said Terval, finding his tongue at last.

Keith looked disappointed. "Are you sure? Do you think you are the best judge? Knowing you a little, I should say not. Can you not tell me the difficulties, and perhaps I" —

Seeing that he hesitated, Terval said at once,

"There are various reasons — and they 're not so easy to tell — that makes it impossible for me to think of going away for a while."

"But man, man, you will never go," protested Keith.

"It cannot be helped, then," was the phlegmatic answer.

"Let us see, now. There 's Barbie " —

"It isna that."

"And the croft."

"It isna that."

"And your mother is getting old."

"It isna that."

"All these things could be managed," said Keith.

"The thing I speak of canna be managed," said Terval, and after a long hesitation, added, "or told — even to you."

Keith looked at him, both puzzled and sympathetic: "I have no desire to know, except as I can help, and it has seemed to me, after considering the matter carefully, that here after all these years was a God-sent chance for you to make a beginning."

"I am sorry — after your trouble — to seem ungrateful in the matter," began Terval stiffly.

"It 's not that, man; but surely you are more obstinate than need be."

As Terval was silent, he continued: "I know something of you and of your mother, and I know that Osla will be pining for somebody to look after when Nenie 's married. Don't you think by renting the croft and by their spinning and knitting, and all that, the three women could manage? You could send them money, you know."

"I would like fine to go out into the world," said Terval hesitatingly.

"It 's the thing for you," interrupted Keith, with enthusiasm. "Why, man, with a little pulling together, you know enough for a book on the language, customs, ethnology, and folk-lore of the people here. You would get on well."

"But I dona ken that I would over-much like to go South," continued Terval, almost as if the other had not spoken. "I like to be on the sea; I like to be crossing the sea. I dona ken whether I could ever write a book of any sort, or put what I know to any use; but I should like fine to go to the Mother Country — only it canna be yet for a while."

Keith shrugged impatiently: "It 's like moving the Birrier to move you, man. And, of course, if you don't want to give any reasons" —

"Aw, well, it isna just convenient — I canna give a better reason than that."

"You won't take a favor from any one. Norse pride, I call it."

"Maybe so," admitted Terval, smiling a little.

"Well, I 'll tell Alec, then, that you won't listen to it?"

"Canna," said Terval calmly.

"And if you never have another chance" —

"There 's time enough."

"But you 're getting gray, man."

"Still, there 's a deal of time — in one form or another," said Terval serenely.

"Well, it seems to me you take it very coolly. In your place I should" —

"Coolly?" repeated Terval. "I don't know about that. There 's often whirly-pools in the sea and to spare, when the top of it looks as still as the land. It might be like the tides at Muness that rock a boat when the sea is like ice."

"Perhaps. But if you wait much longer, you will be putting it off until you get to heaven."

"My heaven is no just exactly yours," said Terval, as he rose to go. "I may see mine yet before I die."

"What, then?"

"Just Norway."

Keith shook his head impatiently.

"Some day I shall wander about and learn to

ken all the old country folk, and perhaps I shall find there something of what I have missed."

"Perhaps," admitted Keith. "I hope so — and yet" —

"So," said Terval. "If there's no more to be said about Mester Murray, good-night then."

CHAPTER XX

JORAM SEEKS A WIFE

As Magnie Manson was sitting on the kitchen settle in quiet conference with his pipe, there was a sudden whirl of skirts, and his daughter Peggy danced up and took him by the beard.

"What ails thee, lass?" he asked, unresisting.

"Daddy, I 'm got a love-letter!" she bubbled.

The skipper's pipe ceased to smoke as he looked at her hard a moment; but he asked placidly, "Who 's the lad?"

"Joram Ingster," she giggled, with her apron at her mouth.

At this Magnie fairly took the pipe from his mouth and watched the sparks die out before he observed: —

"I didna ken he was seekin' thee."

"No more did I, daddy."

Magnie silently held out his hand for the letter, and read aloud, with some difficulty: —

"Dear Miss Manson I now sit down to write you this few Lines hopping it will find you well as

it leive me at Presant I 'm ben fealin Lonesum O nihgts lately when Im cum Home from the fishin and maybe. If a sensable lass like yoursel was to be sitin on the other Side o the fire in mams big Chair at she left me I coudna mak a wiser chowse as yoursel. Im maybe no so bony as sum O the young lads butt Jewl. I have twartree bits O things lade by and sum Money in the Bank at Lerwick ye needna truble. to anser these as Im cumin up for to see you a bout it thursday next and I am Menewhile Yours truly J Ingster "

"Can ye make it out at all?" asked Peggy, biting the hem of her apron.

"Aye, that I can," he answered in all serenity now, "it just comes o' havin' twa Margarets in the house. It 's thy auntie's letter — yon."

"Auntie — Auntie Meggy-Betty's?"

"Aye."

"But she never had a — why, dad, Joram 's no seekin' her — surely?"

"I shouldna wonder."

"Weel," she sighed, "I shouldna have believed it, if anybody else was said it."

"And why no?"

"Just because — I couldna somehow think of Auntie Meggy-Betty sweetheartin'."

"When she was at the fishin' with me," said Magnie, waving his pipe with slow emphasis, "it were Joram looked after her same 's she was a bairn; and when we come home, it were Joram said she hadna been sick ava'."

"Weel," Peggy mimicked his earnest manner, "she can have yon letter for my carin'; but it 's Joram that looks at me every Sunday in the kirk."

"So!" said the skipper, unconvinced.

As Meggy-Betty just then came in, her niece tossed her the letter and ran down the brae with a naughty laugh.

"Is it no Peggy's?" she asked wonderingly.

"Read it, lass, read it; ye 'll ken fast enough. Peggy thought it were hers surely; but ye 'll ken if onybody kens."

Meggy-Betty had already retreated with her treasure into the wee box-room off the kitchen, that she shared with Peggy. She was trying to remember when she had had a letter. The postmark was Lerwick and the writing looked like a man's, but there was never a man in the world would be writing to her.

With a sudden fear that it might be Peggy's after all, she carefully drew forth her first love-letter and spelled it through, with a strange uplifting and tightening of the heart-strings. And when she had

done, she looked through her little window far down the bay to the open sea, but with dim eyes that saw not the wheeling gulls nor the sparkle of the Skerries in the afternoon sunlight. There was somebody then — undreamed of — somebody — if it was only Joram — who wanted to be her man.

The sixth — or seventh — time that she toiled through the letter, to be quite sure there was no mistake, it rushed upon her with a shock that this was the Thursday he had set for his coming. But where, then, had the letter been all this while? It was dated Sunday evening; that would be after the kirk he was writing. On Monday the St. Sunniva had called, and surely, by some mistake, the postmaster had put Joram's letter in with the southbound mails, — so that it had gone all the way to Lerwick, and returned by the post-boat that very afternoon. Five days and maybe a hundred and fifty miles; and the message might have been brought by word of mouth in ten minutes! This — not to speak of the stamp — was true devotion; but it burned Meggy-Betty with a strange sense of unreality. She seemed to herself transformed, as she had sometimes thought she would be when she suddenly found herself in heaven without her body.

Her hands trembled with a new kind of awkwardness as she brought out the tea-things.

Magnie smiled in his beard, as he observed her high color. "Ye 'll be wantin' a fire ben, the night," he said slyly.

"Maybe I 'll better put a few peats in," she admitted.

"I doubt Joram 'll need some help before ye 're done, lass. He 's been a long time comin' to it, Meggy-Betty, a long time; but I 'll no say that he mightna have done worse than he have."

She cleared her throat and tried to tell him that it was no use for Joram to speak; but she could not say that her mind was set otherwise. And the more she saw that the skipper had no glimpse of the truth, the less could she make him understand; so being a woman of few words, she saved these few for Joram.

Presently she went ben and made up the fire; and put little bunches of tawny marigolds and rose-colored sweet-williams in the twin vases labeled "A present from Aberdeen" that balanced the two ends of the mantel-shelf. She lighted the big lamp and turned it low, and laid a copy of "Brands plucked from the Burning" at a carefully considered angle on the red table-cover.

After that she went back into her little room, and after much fumbling and indecision tied about her neck a yellow and green plaid ribbon that Magnie

had bought her ten years before in Edinburgh. It did not suit her complexion, alas! but she knew by divinely implanted instinct that a woman should look her best when dismissing a suitor; and this was her only piece of fashion from the great outside world. Usually she wore her hair brushed back from her high polished forehead into a flat knot on the neck. This night she made guilty attempts with young Peggy's curling-pins. Unfortunately there was not time to complete the process; and the result was strings of damp twisted locks about the ears.

She sat down with the family, quietly knitting; but though her hands were busy with her sock, through the top of her bent head she was burningly aware of their unspoken comments. It did not matter that grandad seemed to be in a doze on the settle, that Magnie was invisible behind the "Shetland Times," that the laddies were plaiting straw ropes for creels, that Lowra's spinning-wheel and Peggy's chirred and hummed together in ceaseless rhythm. Meggy-Betty grew presently so uncomfortable beneath the weight of their united thought that, although her heart jumped into her mouth at the sound of heavy, uncertain feet on the stones outside, she went almost with relief to meet the expected guest.

"Come in ben to the fire," she said huskily; and preceded him to turn up the lamp.

It was well for her that she busied herself about the room, not daring to look at him. At first he stood awkwardly staring at the closed door, as if he expected some one else to appear. Then he twirled his cap until he remembered that he was twirling it, and tried to place it on the table, but so clumsily that it fell to the ground and he had to get down and grope for it.

When he looked up again, Meggy-Betty had both fire and lamp to her liking and was settling herself in a chair, as she said to him cordially, though shyly, "Sit you down."

Then it was that Joram's eyes bulged and his jaw dropped; he had got the wrong woman!

He sat down dazed, and there was silence between them, save for the click of her needles against her knitting-belt. He was wondering how it had come about; this was not the pretty girl who had distracted his attention during sermon-time. There was the letter; he turned hot and cold as he remembered that he had addressed it to "Margaret," — had forgotten that there was more than one Margaret in the world. He felt the sweat gathering under his hair, and dared not lift his hand to brush it away.

She, for her part, was thinking that he seemed fair frightened, and, already pitying him for his coming disappointment, was wondering how she could get him to begin, so as to have it over with as soon as possible. At least she thought this was in her mind, being all unaware of the depths of coquetry in her untried soul.

Finally the silence became unbearable and she asked, "What likena night is it?"

"Coorse — I — I mean fine!" he stuttered. "I doubt there 'll be a lump o' rain afore long; or — or" —

Again there was silence.

"He 's been very coorse weather, the week," she ventured again.

"Neither it will indeed," said Joram, staring at his muddy boots.

This time she resolved she would not break the silence; she would wait for him to speak, if it lasted until bedtime.

Slowly, slowly, his courage swelled until it reached his tongue; and though his first attempt resulted in an indistinct and unintelligible sound, Meggy-Betty waited politely.

As nothing more came, she decided to consider this a remark, and asked if it was true that the Hendersons' cow was sold.

"Yea," he said. "Did you get a letter from me?"

"Yea, yea, I'm had a letter," she answered, demurely counting stitches.

"O Lord!" he groaned.

"What did you say?"

"It were five pound they wanted," he answered desperately, "but they only got four pound ten."

"And enough too," was her curt reply. She was annoyed that he had veered away from the subject.

"It's a fine cow," he said obstinately; but she would not take up the argument, so he said with a feeble attempt at a smile, unfortunately quite lost in his beard: —

"A man 's no writing a letter like yon, every day of his life."

"Like what?" she asked.

"Like yon letter o' mine."

"Aw, weel — na, it is to be hoped he isna," she admitted, with her broad smile.

"A man should be very careful always no to make a mistake." He wondered if she would fathom this deeply buried hint; but she said innocently enough: —

"Na, but of course a man kens his own mind, afore he writes a letter like yon."

Already she began to reproach herself for letting

him go on thus; but he was so excessively shy, how could she declare her own feelings until he came to the point?

"I 'm no got over much money," he began again, in a hollow, mournful tone.

"Aw, weel, we dona value a man for what he 's worth, now do we?" she asked cheerfully.

Whereupon he made another desperate effort — the last struggle of the fish before the net chokes him.

"I never saw such a year for getting crofts. There 's none to be had, and the Lord kens when there will be."

"Oh, ye mak a fair livin' at the fishing," she encouraged him.

"Na, na, very bad — very bad," he muttered.

And again there was silence until she made conversation by asking: —

"Did you hear that Davie Mouat 's goin' to Lerwick? His croft 's to be let at three pound the year, and a good bargain at that. It 's fine ground and three acres of it, with runnin' water at the bottom o' the fields, and peats at the very door. It 's a good, dry, two-roomed house, with a barn and a byre. It 's a rare chance, Magnie was tellin' me the day."

"Is it no spoke for?" he asked feebly. Alas!

he himself two hours before had been to see the factor about it, and had come away high in hopes.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, and he judged that his visit to the factor was known, and gave himself up for lost.

"Will you have me then, Meggy-Betty?" he asked, in a tone of despair.

"No I!" came from her with a promptness that amazed herself. She had fully intended to break it to him gently.

"What did you say?" he asked anxiously.

"I 'm very sorry, Joram, but I canna — as I should have wrote to ye, if — if there had been time."

He mopped his brow in silence, while she pitied him; then he quavered feebly: —

"And why no?"

"Because I 'm no goin' to have anybody," she answered, with keen relish of the situation.

"It 's a good croft," he persisted from a sense of duty, now that the danger was over.

"Yea," she assented, and added hastily, "but the croft 's no the man!"

"Am I so ill?" he asked, offended.

"Na, na, Joram. You 're right enough; but I 'm no a marryin' woman, ye ken, and I couldna leave dad — and — and" —

It was of no use to pretend to knit any longer; the tears were coming fast. Joram saw them, rose stiffly, and held out his hand.

"So," he said sadly. "Good-night, then."

She went into her little room and wept, partly for joyful pride in having had a sweetheart at last, partly for his disappointment, partly for the good croft that was not to be hers, and partly — for something else.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ROOM WITH THREE WINDOWS

When Barbie came home to Framgord at the setting in of winter, Terval and his mother made ready her old room under the roof, which had grown thick with dust since her marriage. Terval built huge fires on the hearth, swept and washed the windows; his mother scrubbed floor and furniture, aired the bed, and set out bits of trinkets on the dressing-table.

Then at last, on a clear day in late October, when the roads were yet sparkling after a heavy rain in the night, Terval borrowed a neighbor's peat cart and fetched the two wanderers home.

The old woman at the gate watched the odd procession all the way as it encircled the voe: the stout little black pony, and Terval, looking out of reason tall as he led it, then the sky-blue cart with red wheels, a dark figure in it that must be Barbie, and a flash of red now and then — Christy's little shirt — as the laddie became restless and moved from one side to another.

The cart creaked below the brae and stood still,

then Terval left Christy, inordinately proud in being allowed to hold the reins of the pony, and carried Barbie up the hill, into the house, and up the steep stairway, without so much as a glance at the rope handrail, into her own room.

The old woman followed as fast as she could, with inarticulate endearments; and the two clasped each other in silence.

"I like to be here," said Barbie at last, beginning to take off her shawls; "there 's no being lonely with the three windows."

"Aye," said Terval. "Dr. Cochrane thinks you 'll better not go downstairs at all for a while till the warm weather 's come."

Barbie tried to answer, but fell into a cough that left her faint and breathless. But when the old woman was gone down to make her a cup of tea, she went from window to window in a kind of feverish excitement.

"When I dona like the sea, I 'll just bring my chair here and look up into the heart of the hills with the sheep grazing and the wee burnies glintin' in the sun; and when I 'm lonely, I 'll just come here and look down at the voe, and see the toon and the hooses and the people going to the kirk and all, and the steamer; and other days I 'll sit here where there 's nothing in the world but the sea itself."

And this indeed became much the way of Barbie's life. She moved from window to window according to the mood of the day, or her own mind; and though she said little, seemed not ill content.

For the first time in her life she took kindly to the fine knitting. She was not able to spin much, — it made her cough, — but both her mother and Osla were adept at the art of drawing out threads more slender than silk, nearly as frail and delicate as a cobweb. When this white gossamer was put into Barbie's listless hands she conceived a love for it and knitted most of the day, working out her own fancies into designs as intricate as any frostwork that ever was set upon window-pane.

She was not lonely, for she had Christy much with her and taught him his letters and told him old tales; and though Terval offered to take him to the school three miles across the valley, she would not spare him, saying that he was too little to go so far in rough weather. She had visitors too: Osla and Nenie often with bits of sewing that before long would be worn in the South; Meggy-Betty more rarely, but always with mutton-broth or some other thing for the making of which she was known widely; and when she could not come, she sent Peggy or one of the laddies with a dish she had contrived. The other neighbors, too, were kindly,

and went upstairs to admire and came down to condole. Every evening after supper Terval sat with her, reading aloud or silently, as she chose; and the old woman was up and down all the day until she trembled with weariness; and many a time clung fast to the rope in the fear that she might fall headlong.

People often asked Barbie what her knitting should be used for; but she never could tell in a way to satisfy them: "Oh, it might be a bride's veil, but it couldna be ready in time for Nenie to wear; or it might be a christening robe if there was ever a bairn at Framgord."

She told Terval this one evening when he sat alone with her.

"I 'm thinkin' that will no be very soon," he answered rather sadly.

"I wish it might be, Terval; I would like fine to think it was for your bairn," she said again.

He shook his head, and no more was said at that time.

Of Yuletide rejoicing there was little at Framgord, although not a few of the sailor lads, who at this one time of the year manage to get home to parents and wives and sweethearts, walked out on the Point to see her whom many of them had sought for a wife years before. They usually left some gift

as a shy tribute to old memories; and after that Yuletide Barbie's table held an odd collection of trophies: a little silver Buddha from Bombay, a long white ostrich feather from the Cape of Good Hope, a boxful of crystals from Terra del Fuego, a book of views of Seattle, a stuffed parrakeet from Ceylon. . . .

One wild snowy day early in February, Osla and Nenie struggled out upon the Point with letters and great news. Terval was away upon the hills seeking a sheep that he feared was buried in a drift in the deep hollow at the far end of Omandsdale; so the four women laughed and cried together without restraint.

It seemed that Charlie had made up his mind to wait no longer, that he had even gone so far as to find a wee house and buy a harmonium, and that he had set the date for his coming north to the wedding only three weeks later.

"Such a lad!" says Nenie, all in a flutter. "I canna be ready."

And Osla added that there was scarce time for the banns, to say nothing of the dress.

After that she sat silent, with her dark eyes brighter than usual in the firelight, while Nenie rattled on to Barbie of what she had done and what remained unfinished, until at last she under-

stood her mother's mood and stopped to hug her close: "Indeed, mam, I 'll no go at all if you say the word."

"Hear the lass!" said Osla cheerfully, and added to Barbie, "What likena dress should she have, think you?"

"I ken fine what would please her best," said Barbie. "A pale blue silk and a tulle veil — like mine."

Nenie hid her face against her mother's knee.

"Aye, that it would," agreed Osla, stroking the girl's silky light hair. "She 's just her father over again in the face, and I never liked him so well as in a blue necktie the color of his eyes. If he might be home for the wedding, lass" —

"Mother, I 'll bide with thee," said the girl, with quick-springing tears.

"You 'll do nothing of the sort," Osla was declaring, when Barbie interrupted to say: —

"If she 's no afraid of the bad luck, I 'll give her my dress and veil, and gladly."

"O Barbie, would you so?" cried the girl in a quiver of delight.

But Osla protested: "We 'll better go to Lerwick to buy thee one, lass."

"But there 's no time," pleaded Nenie. "O Barbie, you 's just a jewel!"

"It 's in the chest yonder," said Barbie. "Maybe it 'll no need to be changed so much."

So it happened that Terval, looking in at the unwonted sound of laughter from his sister's room, found a blushing bride just wriggling out of a cloudy veil, and hastily withdrew his ruddy face and snow-wreathed cap, well pleased at their cheer.

He came in later, when he had changed his steaming clothes; but it was not until he had been sitting by the fire for some while, when Nenie and Osla were on the point of going, that the girl suddenly clapped her hand to her pocket with a conscience-stricken face. "I 'm got a letter for you, Barbie, and when I 'd read my own, I thought no more about it until this moment."

"Give it to Terval," said Barbie, with her mouth full of pins, as she re-shaped one of the blue silk sleeves.

She seemed to forget about it, for when the other women were gone and she was alone with her brother she continued to brush out the folds of the silk without asking any question about the letter.

Terval read in his book — or rather had the look of doing so — until the twilight had gathered; then he took up the letter from his knee and fingered it in the hope that she would notice. But she did not,

so at the last he said, "Are you no wanting to read your letter, lass?"

"Na," she said quietly; "it will be from London, I doubt."

"Shall I look at the postmark?" he asked. "Na, na; we 'll have the lamp first."

She put out a protesting hand. "Just read it by the firelight, Terval, and tell me what 's in it."

He carefully cut the end of the envelope with his knife, and drew the sheet out. Then he hesitated: "Will it no be better for thee to read it thyself, lass?"

"Na, na," she insisted. "It would make me cry, and then I should cough again all the night long. Read you."

He held it close to the flames and read it in silence.

"Well?" she asked, when it seemed he had nothing to say.

"He wants thee back, lass," said Terval simply.

"Does he ken I 'm here?" she cried, breathless.

"He writes to ask that. At first he believed thee — he says he never knew thee before to say what was untrue — and he sought thee everywhere, according to thy letter. And then his mother found that thy Shetland things were gone, and that made

them think — he will come up now — any day — and fetch thee home."

"Terval," she said eagerly, "ye 'll just write and say you opened the letter, and that I 'm no here, and ye dona ken where I am "—

"Na, na," said Terval; "I 'll no do that."

"But surely — could he no make me go back by the law, Terval?"

"Aye, that he can. Are you no wantin' to go, lass?"

"You ken better, Terval."

"But he is thy man."

She began to sob a little, and he feared for the cough.

"Dona greet about it," he said. "I 'll never let him take thee against thy will — while I 'm alive, lass, — law or no law."

"Ah, then," she sighed with relief. "But how shall we manage, Terval?"

"We shall make do," he said.

"Write to him — this shall be true, Terval — write that it 's rough crossing in the winter, and that I 'm — that we 're very well where we are, and that he shall come for me in the spring."

"Do you mean that, lass?"

"That I do," she answered very quietly. "I 'm frighted now at the bare thought of living through

it all again, but in the spring — I shallna mind; and I'll go wi' him — God willing. Write him that, Terval."

"Aye, I might write him that," said Terval, but was glad of the twilight as he buried his face in his hands, wondering what the New Year would bring.

There was silence for a time; then Barbie said: "The letter, Terval — burn it; I dona want to: read it."

But even as it broke into flames she cried out, "I might have read it myself; I might have done so much," and burst into sobs that brought on the coughing he so much dreaded.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CALLING O' THE SHEEP

It was a sad enough wedding — Nenie's — for neither Barbie nor the grandmother could come down; and Terval stayed only through the ceremony. None the less, the fiddling and dancing and story-telling went on, and the tables were set forth with roast goose and wedding-cake. And when the lad who had been posted to keep watch, announced that the steamer had left Burra, the little bride, with the blue silk laid aside for a moorit tweed, was already enveloped in shawls and embraces.

Osla let all the others go to the landing, and stood alone in her doorway, waving her handkerchief until the flit-boat reached the steamer; and after that, her apron in response to the flutter of white from the side of the St. Sunniva, until even the last inch of mast had vanished behind the point. And long after she stood tearless looking out towards the open sea.

On the next morning, when she had nearly finished scrubbing away the footprints and crumb-marks from the wedding, the doctor entered sud-

denly and bade her put some things together, saying that he would drive her across to Framgord, where she was more needed than in trying to redd up a spotless house.

She asked at once, was Barbie worse?

"Not so bad," he evaded her; "but still you would be useful. The old woman can't do much, and Terval tries to do it all. Now if I set you down there and drive off with the key of your house, he 'll have to take you in — see? I tell you, you 'll be needed, woman."

Perhaps a little to the surprise of both, Terval welcomed her without protest of any sort; and she fell into her place at Framgord as easily as if she had never been away.

By a curious tacit understanding, she and Terval always knew perfectly how to divide the work between them. So they two nursed the invalid, and the old woman sat by the kitchen fire, moaning over memories, and comforting herself as well as might be with little Christy, of whom she had whole charge during these weary days.

One sunny afternoon in March the house at Framgord was very still. There was no sound upstairs, and below only a low crooning from the little boy as he played on the hearth with chips given him by the joiner. His grandmother was pretend-

ing to knit, but for the most part watched the game, now and then wiping away a tear that rolled slowly down her hollow, brown cheek.

Terval came in presently from his outside duties, and relieved Osla at the bedside. "I 'll no be long wi' the milking," she whispered, "and then I 'll come back. Dona forget the medicine when she wakes."

He sat down in the big-eared armchair, and mechanically took up a book; but he did not read, — only sat silent and immovable while the shadows lengthened, until with a sudden sense of chill in the air he perceived that the sun was gone for the day, and that twilight was in the room. He stooped and began softly to heap more peats on the hearth, but the slight sound awakened Barbie.

"Have they put it up yet?" she asked dreamily.

"Put up what, lass?"

"The white cloth on the peat-stack?"

"What for?"

"For us to go and call in the sheep."

"It 's no time yet," he said gently, restraining her when she tried to rise.

"Yea, yea, it 's over late! I must go. Where 's Koll? Where 's the dog, Terval? I shall be late. We 're off to the far hills, the morn!"

She lay back in a fit of coughing, and he quickly

poured out the medicine and offered it; but she pushed it back so rudely that he barely saved it from being spilled.

"Dona give it to me," she said. "It 's the salt water for the sheep. Ah! — the bonnie morning!" — she drew a long breath of ecstasy. "I 'm nowhere so happy as up here on the hills, among the heather and the blueberries. Quick, Koll — yon — yon — quick, lad — yon 's the fold!" She tried in vain to whistle, but fell back exhausted. "I 'm no got any breath more, Terval. What 's wrong wi' me? I canna run as I ran before I went away to the South. Come, now — I 'll climb into the fold — I ken every one of our sheep. Give me the bottle of water. Have you got any dry salt? I 'll make this one eat it — so, so! . . . Na, that 's no our own — look at the ear-mark — look, then! I canna find it! I canna find it! Terval," — she sat up again — "where 's our wee moorit lamb?"

"Be quiet, lass, and put thy head down. I 'll go and fetch him," he said.

"I canna find him," she moaned, "and that 's the woe! He was the best lamb I 'm got."

A moment later Terval brought up Christy, still clinging to his chips, and set him on the bed.

"See my ship, mammy," he cried, in his penetrating baby voice.

"Is du going out in her — soon?" she asked, looking at him wistfully, but making no effort to touch him.

"Yea — when I 'm big — and the water 's all quiet."

She glanced appealingly at her brother. "He canna help it, Terval; he 's no like ourselves. He 's all different — different."

Christy slipped to the floor after one of his chips, and then toiled down the stairs to his grandmother, who had been telling him a story.

"There 's just this about it," said Barbie presently. "I ken you would keep the laddie and love him for my sake" —

"Surely, lass, and for his own."

"But if *he* should come in the spring, remember, Terval, the laddie belongs to the South. He may look like us, but you canna give him a Norse heart at all."

"I will do what I can for him, Barbie," he said slowly.

"Ah, you dona think his father will come — well. Terval, I have tried what I could all these months. I have held him on my knee and told him all the stories — I could remember — to put courage into him. I showed him the Sneugie, where the Norwegian ship came ashore, and how some

of the sailors had climbed up the cliffs, and how you and Magnie Manson had gone down with ropes " —

" Lass, lass," he protested.

" Well, it was true enough, Terval; but it only frighted him. And then I told him of father's last night at the fishin' — how the other men died one after another, and he and Eric brought the wreck o' the boat in at Gloup. And at the end of it all, Terval, the bairn only cried."

" Aw, well, when he grows up," he tried to soothe her.

" It 's in their blood," she whispered, " to fear the sea — and hate it. Be gentle wi' him that 's different frae wis. He canna help it."

After a time she said, " I 'm often thinkin' o' father, and mindin' how he lay all that winter as I 'm lyin', and told me stories as I 'm tellin' Christy. He were always kind, same as yourself, Terval."

" There wasna another man in Setter like him," said Terval, " nor will be soon."

They heard Osla without, helping their mother up the stairs; and when she was set in the big chair by Barbie's bedside, Osla signed to Terval to come away.

One moment Barbie turned her face away to the wall, then stretched her hand along the bed-

clothes to meet his. By the glow of the red peats he could see that her face was glistening with sweat. He brushed it off with his great fingers. Though toil-hardened and with broken nails, they were yet gentle enough in such service.

Then they left mother and daughter together and sat in the kitchen a long while, Osla, strangely enough for her, with folded hands, and Terval making a pretence at showing Christy how to weave a creel of straw. Later on Osla carried some food upstairs, and Terval gave Christy his hot bread and milk and put him to bed. When Osla came down again, her brown cheek looked rather pale. "I think — maybe — Terval, ye 'd best go for the doctor." Then she suddenly clasped her hands together. "*Less*, *less*, the doctor is in Fetlar! There 's a woman very bad there, I 'm heard."

"I 'll go for him at once," said he.

And Osla answered his unspoken appeal with "Aye, aye, we 'll do all that 's in our power, lad."

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE DOCTOR WAS BROUGHT FROM FETLAR BY NIGHT

MEGGY-BETTY started from her sleep at the sound of Terval's voice shouting below her window. But some one else had been quicker to hear before she was awake enough to realize what this meant. Magnie had his head out of the window, answering: —

"Aye, aye, that I will. Go you and sort the boat. I 'll be comin' in a peerie while, and bring Bartle Hoseason. The wind will be fair goin'; but comin' back we shall need three men to pull."

"Aye, aye," said Terval's voice, now sounding from the distance.

By the time that Meggy-Betty had reached the foot of the stairs, the sound of hurried movement below had ceased; Magnie was off.

"What 's wrong?" she asked her sister-in-law.

"It 's Barbie," said Laura. "They 're going to Fetlar to bring the doctor."

The two women looked at each other, and finally Laura asked, "Think you we 'd better go up?"

"I dona ken," answered Meggy-Betty slowly. "If we could help — but there 's two of them — and Osla will ken what to do. I doubt we should only be in the way."

"Maybe we 'll best wait till the morning," assented Laura, with a yawn.

But Meggy-Betty was not yet content; she pondered the matter further, and said at last, "I 'm thinkin' that — maybe — I 'll better go — after all."

Laura stared, but as she was not minded that Meggy-Betty should have the advantage of her in respect to news, remarked, "Aw, weel, we might just go and ask if we can do anything."

And while the women watched and waited, and did such service as they knew, the three men were sailing on a stiff, chill March wind to Fetlar. Terval was halyardsman, Bartle held the sheet, and Magnie steered. The night was so dark that the outline of the hills was scarcely blacker than the water itself; but at first Magnie had the light of the Manse window as a guide, then the roar of the breakers about Kay Holm, where danger lurked in the sucking of the tides among deep caverns, and then for a while it was star work until the light of Funzie should shine upon them.

After the first few awkward words of inquiry about Barbie, Magnie could find nothing to say, and

Terval was not more inclined for speech. But Bartle Hoseason was a loquacious man, who hated silence as Nature a vacuum; hence after enduring to his limit — which was not very long — the stillness of the night, broken only by the rush of the boat over the waves, he deemed it wiser as well as pleasanter for all that a general conversation be opened.

"I 'm a God-fearin' man," he began in his hoarse, cracked voice, — he had a perennial bad throat, — "and I goes to the kirk twice reg'lar, as surely as Sunday comes, and listens to the teachin' o' the Bible; but when I 'm off on the sea like this by night, it seems as if I must have the comfortin' sound o' human voices about me."

As he waited for a reply, Magnie said, "There 's many a man feels that, Bartle, especially when the wind is humming in the rigging o' nights."

"Aw, it 's no that I 'm afraid of anything — I put my trust in the Lord — but there 's a kind of memory sings itself in my head about the creatures that lived in the sea."

"Do you mean leviathan and the like?" asked Magnie.

"Na, na; no the creatures o' the Bible. They 're Christian beasts, and right enough. I mean the — *old things*."

"Mermaids and the like?"

"Aye, the seals that lays aside their skins when they will. I ken it 's impossible that such things should be; it 's against all the laws o' Nature, as I 'm heard Mr. Keith say. But for all that" —

"Hsh!" said Magnie. "I wouldna talk about such things now."

"But for all that, though I 'm no frighted o' them, they comes up in my mind, so to speak," concluded Bartle, with an apprehensive glance over his shoulder.

"They say that the Swinister men feels different about it," said Magnie thoughtfully. "One o' them told me he was the only man in the toon 'at dared go home alone at night — by land. But they 'd sail all over the sea and have no fear. This man told me that his uncle would go rock-nosing all about the island, but as soon as he comes to the land he just stands in his boat and whistles till they comes down in a body to fetch him home. Some folk is awful wheer."

All the way across, until the boat came within the wide circle of light shed from Funzie lighthouse, they talked of such matters; but Terval continued aloof and silent in his trouble. The things that had once interested him now seemed but the babble of fools. . . .

As the keel grated on the shingle he leaped into the water, knee-deep, and drew the boat ashore. Then he paused just a moment to suggest that they go up to the nearest cottage for shelter and get a bit of sleep.

"Na, na," interrupted Magnie. "We might keep you waitin'. We 'll just have a nap under the boat. Get you on your way, lad."

With his long, sure stride Terval began to climb the hills; and having no thought save for the pressing need that drove him on, had walked the six miles ere he was aware.

His heart failed him somewhat as he drew near to the house with the lighted windows. What right had he to take the doctor away from one dying woman, on the bare chance of his being able to help another? Yet without perceptible hesitation he walked up to the door and knocked softly. A slow step sounded within, and a haggard-faced man appeared.

"Come in to the fire," he said, showing no surprise.

As Terval entered, several little tousled heads popped up from the bed; the lights and moving about were keeping the bairns awake.

"Ye 'll be come for the doctor, maybe?" asked the man.

Terval nodded, and after a pause added, "Is she — very bad?"

It was the other man's turn to nod. "Sit you down," he said slowly, as if it was with difficulty that he opened his grave, set lips.

The inner door opened and a woman appeared. "Is it the doctor ye 're come for?" she asked, and upon his answer, said, "I 'll just tell him," and disappeared.

The two men sat in silence, while among the bairns there was a suppressed whispering and fluttering that subsided whenever their father looked that way.

Presently Dr. Cochrane came in and drew a chair softly to Terval's side. "You 'll just have to wait," he said, in a voice that had lost some of its usual good-nature. "I can't leave one woman to die, on the chance of saving another."

"Na, na," said Terval, surprised to hear aloud the very words in his mind. "I maun just wait."

"Well," said the doctor, "I 'm sorry I can't be in two places at once." Then he turned to the other man, whose eyes had not left his face. "And you 'll just have to be patient too, my man; I 'm doing my level best. Seems to me your wife has had too many children before to make such a fuss about this one; but the perversity of some females

is remarkable. You never can tell." He seemed to have forgotten his auditors, and was apparently speaking to himself. Then he pulled out his watch. "Tut, tut — half-past twelve! Well, I 'll be back as soon as I can."

And he left them to their silent vigil. The children dropped off to sleep one by one, and there was no sound except the jerky, asthmatic ticking of a big wooden clock. Every tick threatened to be its last. Terval sat watching the slow swing of the pendulum behind the painted roses on the glass front, and wondered whether the clock would stop, or the doctor reappear first. The other man never moved except to heap fuel on the fire.

Later on, through weariness and exposure to the sharp night air, Terval fell into a doze, and dreamed strange, sorrowful dreams of lost things that he could not find.

Suddenly he started up. The man of the house had disappeared, and by his side stood the doctor, drawing on his fur-lined gloves, and saying, "I 'm ready now."

Perceiving that Terval was looking at the crazy clock that was still ticking, and now pointed to a quarter past ten, the doctor added briskly, "All off, that clock; it 's nearly three."

"Is it — is she — ?"

"All right," was the dry answer. "Food supply to be divided by seven now instead of six; and little enough there was before."

As they went out they were met by the woman's husband. His mouth was relaxed, and his eyes looked the gratitude that he could not speak, as he squeezed the doctor's hand until the bones cracked.

"Well, my man, I hope you're properly pleased?"

"I canna just say," he answered, with a dim smile. "It's the will o' God, I doubt."

"*I doubt* it," said the doctor gruffly. But the man was full of his own thought.

"We must just make do as we can," he went on patiently. "But I'm thankful to you for saving the wife. It would have been harder" —

"No doubt," said the doctor with irony. "Good-night to you. I'll be back to-morrow or the next day, if there's any crossing." He turned up his fur collar and tramped off into the night.

As Terval lingered a moment behind, the man said to him, "I'm hoping you'll find all right when you get back. The doctor's a wheer man; but over kind." His voice grew husky and stopped. The two shook hands and parted in silence.

There were no words on the six-mile walk back

to the boat: Terval was too anxious and the doctor short of breath. They found Magnie and Bartle holding the boat, ready to push it into the water, having heard, while they were yet some distance off, footsteps beating the road. The wind was still high and against them, so the three Shetlanders took to the oars, Magnie and Bartle pulling together, and Terval alone in the bow; and the doctor steered.

It was Cochrane this time who seemed to find the silence unprofitable, for they had not gone far from the lee of the land on the homeward journey, before he observed, "We all have to turn ourselves into night-owls occasionally, boys. Fishermen and doctors more than most."

"So it will be," agreed Bartle eagerly. "And there 's others, too. Old Sweeti, now" —

"My rival," put in the doctor grimly.

"Surely," said Bartle, who, not knowing in the least what the word meant, yet had implicit faith in the doctor's infallibility. "Now she gathers all her roots by night. She told my missus" —

"What did I say to you the last time she dosed your family?" began Cochrane.

"I ken, sir, I ken. I didna want her to go; but this was only for the rheumatics. And I couldna stop her. Women be such fools mostly."

"As long as Sweeti confines her treatment to cows, I 've no objection," said the doctor.

"But I have," interrupted Magnie quickly. "I mind when I was a peerie lad, somebody had been taking the profit from our cow, and my mother had Sweeti come to bring it back again. Such-like go-in's-on I never saw: a-wavin' o' fire around the poor beast, and a-prickin' her with a needle, and a-burnin' o' tar under her nose, and a-shakin' of a leaf from the Bible, and talkin' in old Norn, and a-drawin' a cat by the tail three times down her back, and a-makin' her swallow live crabs, and pills made o' the tar and peat ashes, and I dona ken what all!"

"And what happened?"

"Weel — the animal died," said Magnie seriously.

"She 's a wonderful woman," observed Bartle, "but fearsome. No that I 'm a believer in witches myself."

And all the time Terval pulled steadily, their talk falling upon him as lightly and having as little effect as the frequent dashes of spray across his face.

Presently Bartle the loquacious continued: "Speakin' o' night work, my mother told me once of a woman in her time that had a fearsome way of bringing the profit back to the cow."

"What was that?" asked the doctor.

"I canna mind well; but she took nettles into the kirkyard in the middle of the night, and she made a circle of them, and there was some sort o' verses in which she called upon everybody, from the twelve apostles down to just Satan himself, to bring woe upon them that had bewitched the cow."

"How did it work?" asked the doctor, with an air of professional interest.

"Well," said Bartle, "I never kenned a time that the cow wasna the better or worse of it. But — of course, it 's just nonsense."

And Terval, listening to their talk, entered upon, as he knew well, with kind intention to divert his thoughts, wondered that he had ever cared for idle tales and superstitions when the realities of life and death were so near, — so very near to each other, — pressing upon a man's heart. . . .

As the boat worked her way up Snarravoe into the very heart of the home island, the first dim lightening of the dawn began to flit across the sky; and as the oars creaked up to the landing-place the air was suddenly alive with a hurly-burly of frightened, screaming gulls.

On the road by the fishing-station the little band separated: Magnie and Bartle, with the unspoken wish that their help might have proved to be of

some service, returned to their beds; Terval, with a silent gratitude that was as clearly understood by them, set out with the doctor for Framgord.

It was colder now — so cold that the doctor beat his numbed feet upon the road as they hurried on; but Osla was waiting for them at the gate. Without a word they knew how things were, and followed her silently upstairs.

Outside, the dawn grew grayer and wilder, with a heavy wind; but above the wind rose the shrill cry of a solitary gull, as with a whirr of wings it dropped upon the roof. It was a cry never forgotten by Terval — a plaintive, long-drawn wail, among the formless shadows of the dying night; for it rang in his ears as he watched the light slowly fading out of his sister's eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA

THERE came heavy storms, the breaking up of the winter, shortly after Barbie's death; and there was naught for folk to do but shelter and feed the animals and bide by the fire. The wind blew unceasingly from the southeast, filling the air with sleet and spray, so that it was impossible to see across the voe. Where the water was usually placid as a loch, great rolls of breakers came thundering in on the sand, and heaped it with uprooted weeds and shells and masses of dead fish. The shore was lined with the coarse, shiny, palm-like leaves and stem of the tang.

At Framgord on the Point — although the cliffs here were only about two hundred feet high, yet they should be some barrier, one would say — so great was the fury of the ocean that it was at peril of life and limb that Terval ventured out. Monstrous boulders weighing tons each were hurled on the battered earth, like so many pebbles, and the spray lashed the face like scourges whenever the door was opened. Still the animals must be fed, and Terval went about his duties as usual.

On the third day of the gale, although it had abated considerably, he had an accident. Struggling out to the upturned boat that was built into a shelter for lambs in winter, he was endeavoring to open the door without losing his balance, while the wind dragged incessantly at the basket of fodder hanging from his shoulders, when with a sudden gust the door was caught from his grasp and from its fastenings, and sent bounding and flapping across the turf like a bit of pasteboard. The man could barely keep himself from following.

The lambs, terrified by the sudden noise and commotion, began to pour out of the opening, and to rush in a huddling bunch blindly towards the sea. In a flash Wag was upon them, heading them off, and rounding them back towards their shelter. Unfortunately, in his first leap the dog had separated two of the animals from the rest, and these scampered madly up the hill while he was caring for the others.

Terval's eyes followed the fugitives anxiously; but it was hopeless to think of following them until the greater number were safe. Leaving Wag in charge of the opening, he went off to look for the door; and upon discovering that it had been dashed to pieces upon the rocks at the foot of the cliff, set about making a new one out of such materials as came to hand.

It was afternoon before he succeeded in mending the breach successfully, for he worked as slowly as he worked well. Even then he shook his head, and told himself that this was merely a temporary adjustment, but that it must serve until the storm was past.

Although it would be dark in little more than an hour he resolved to have at least a short look for the foolish wanderers. The wind was not so strong, but was colder, so that there was danger that they might perish of exposure, or in the vain attempt to find shelter might fall over some slippery bank and break their legs.

He made his way up the spongy hillside and walked along the curving ridge, until, without having found any trace of the fugitives, he came out upon the headland of the Birrier at the other end of the toon. Here he swept with his glass the brown-patched moorlands in every direction, to make sure that the sheep were nowhere in sight. They must have gone to the northward, then, and it was too late to follow; they must take their chances for that day.

He turned for a last glance along the banks of the sea before going home; as he looked, the spell of it fell upon him, and he watched the slow climb of the foam-masses up the steep red rocks, and their

slower return, in infinite, thread-like, white tricklings, to the ocean whence they came. As one scarcely conscious of what he is doing, but rather drawn by some instinct, he climbed down, step by step, until he stood at the edge of the beach, as near as a man might venture to the swirl and suck of the waters plunging through the arch of the rock and coiling with a tremendous hiss round the pillar, — the Giant's Leg, — now bare of the gaunt cormorants that roosted on it when the weather was calm. The sea had drawn him like a great cable, down past the ruined sheepfold, down as far as the rotting hulks and timbers of the two foreign ships wrecked there long ago. So far, but no farther; for here through the spray he could discern wet masses of fresh spoils from the sea.

He sat down on one of the beams of the Gerda and fell to thinking. Beyond the chaos of waters in the foreground, beyond the gray veil that covered the horizon, lay Norway. A man might sail there in not so many days, even in a small boat. The old woman from Scalloway — how long had she been on her strange journey? On her way to Lerwick in a herring-boat with three fishermen, off the coast of Dunrossness, not far from Sumburgh Roost, one had fallen overboard, and the two others had put out in the boat to save him and had never returned; so the

boat had drifted on and on with the helpless old woman, who ate and drank and trusted in God, and in the end had been beached off the coast of Norway. A week, that was it; she had been a week on the way. A week between here and Norway — perhaps less. . . .

A wet, porous mass rolled slowly ashore and stopped almost at his feet. He picked it up and examined it — a light, spongy, volcanic substance — from Iceland probably. Curious how things wandered back and forth on the sea. This thing had had a long and roundabout journey surely, before it came to land in the *gjo* of the Birrier. He wondered how many years it had been on the way.

He remembered old stories of things long lost at sea returning at the last — a curious medley of tales of rings that were swallowed by fish and found again, of messages strangely delivered in bottles, after the lapse of many years.

Then all at once his mind turned upon Osla, and the current of his thoughts changed. The woman should not be living alone, he knew that. If only she would come back to Framgord — but she would not for all that he might say, unless he would agree to go South. She might manage the old woman, perhaps, but the work was heavy and — no,

it was like betraying a trust. He sighed heavily as he stared at the foaming sea.

Suddenly his keen eyes caught sight of a round black thing bobbing up and down in the creamy foam. A human head? Impossible. He sprang to his feet and mentally measured the distance. Nonsense, nonsense! What man could swim in those breakers, even for a minute? Besides, the thing was too big for a head. It spun so rapidly that he strained his eyes in vain to discover what it was. A buoy from a fishing-boat? He could not tell; and though the twilight was gathering, resolved to wait until it came ashore.

As he watched, it was suddenly thrown higher than usual, and he saw that it was a cask. He awaited his opportunity, and following up a receding wave, caught hold of one end and dragged it ashore. He was overtaken by the water and wet to the knees — all but carried away by the swell, but the next moment he was rolling up his find to a safe place by the wrecks. It was a rotten, empty cask, battered and broken in places, black-stained, slimy; it might have been used for blubber —

His thinking stopped with a jerk, as there flashed across his vision a name, almost washed away, yet unmistakable — a name that echoed among all the vaults of memory — the Finley Toorie, Eric's

ship! It seemed to him that some one was shouting it over and over again until the rocks rang and the noise of the surges was drowned. He came to his senses to find himself repeating the name aloud mechanically, perhaps in the effort to get it through his brain. And the next thing he was conscious of was the old couplet from the fairy story: —

Little dey kens wha sits at hame
'At Finley Toorie is my name.

Absurd name for a ship! He remembered that Eric had laughed about it; it had been christened by the owner's little daughter, who was not yet beyond the age of fairies. There could be no doubt of it — none; it was a message from the sea. When had she gone down, this ill-starred Finley Toorie? A week out? A month? Had she ever reached the fishing-grounds at all? Her first trip, too. In the old days folk would have said that the sea-fairies were jealous because she was named for a land-fairy. And had the cask been fifteen years on its homeward journey? Surely the ways of the sea are strange beyond belief.

His thoughts were vague and confused — he was stunned by the sudden realization — and yet he had some sort of mental image of the years of midsummer calm and midwinter blasts through which this message had wandered, among conflicting tides

and currents, until it came at last almost to the door of her who still waited and expected to hear from the absent.

There came to him a sudden question: Was he to tell her, and to kill the living hope within her, or should he leave her to find it out or not, as God would? or dared he destroy the cask, and put the certainty of knowledge forever out of her reach?

He sat pondering, sick at heart with the revival of old grief. To destroy it — to shift the responsibility — to tell her then — aye, he must tell her. . . .

"Is it you, Terval?" Her voice on the slope above him.

"Aye."

He got to his feet, wondering if it was too dark for her to see the name, and stepping between her and the cask, with an instinct to spare her at the first.

After all, the cask was no proof of Eric's death — none. And yet it was proof — the tangible thing that killed hope at a blow. He must decide, and quickly, whether to tell her or no. . . .

"Woman," he said, more impatiently than she had often heard him speak, "what brings you here to-night?"

By this time she had come down to his level, and

stood with her hands hanging stiffly at her side, her face seaward.

"I dona ken," she said slowly. "I dona ken. I must come."

He did not answer, wondering how best to begin; and she turned to look at him and saw the broken cask behind him.

"What 's yon?" she asked.

"Drift," was all he could say; and she stepped aside to see it better.

"An empty cask," he went on, clearing his throat and trying to speak naturally.

She went up close to it, as if drawn thither, and stood looking down at it in silence. Then she suddenly put up her hands to tighten the hap about her head and shoulders, shivering as if the wind had pierced her for the first time.

"Is there any name on it?"

"Aye."

She knelt as if to decipher it; but the twilight was settling fast.

"*T*," she said, "*o* — my een is no so good as they was, Terval. What name is it?"

Again the choking in his throat. "Can you no read it, Osla? Na, na, it 's twilight. Come home now, and I 'll tell thee."

"What name is it?" she repeated, looking up,

as she knelt on the sand. She seemed not to have heard what he said.

"It 's the" —

"Finley Toorie, is it no?" she asked slowly and quietly.

"Aye."

He could not see her face well, but he had a strange fancy that she was smiling a little.

"Osla," he said, with a rough, kind hand on her shoulder, "come home."

"Yea, yea," she said. "I 'm coming."

She put up her fingers uncertainly, as if to pull away something from her throat, then desisted. "I 'm forgot. I was going to pull off my bit of red — that he aye liked. I 'm forgot that I took it off for Barbie."

"Come home," he repeated stupidly, "come you home now."

"Get you away," she said; "I 'll come soon." And as he yet stood immovable, she added with sudden fierceness, "Will you no leave me a while with my dead?"

"I'm afraid for thee, Osla," he said simply.

Then she stood up and faced him: "Do you no ken that I 'm a Christian woman?"

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE VALLEY

With the passing of the great storm came the end of winter. In the soft, moist sunshine the old men began to stitch the cow-hide rivlins, so easy on the feet during the delving, and the young men got out and mended their spades.

Terval awoke one fair evening to the realization that some of the neighbors' fields were already patched with the rich brown of upturned clods, that the season for gathering folk-tales had yielded to the time for sowing oats and potatoes.

He said abruptly to his mother that he should begin to dell on the morrow; and to her sharp addition that it was a wonder he remembered it at all, only whistled softly a stave of his beloved —

Far in the mountains Olaf rode.

"Mother," he said presently, "I 've a mind to walk over to Arisdale, the night. They tell me old Jacob Peterson 's failing; and he kens more of the old times than any man I know. I 'd like fine to talk with him a bit more."

"You — with your nonsense," she protested ungraciously; but made no further objection.

"Where 's the laddie?" he asked from the door.

"He 'll be at the Spences'. You 'll be late home, I doubt?"

"Aye."

"I'll no sit up for you, then."

Terval glanced down the valley at the curling smoke from the Spences' chimney, and said, "Perhaps I 'll better fetch the laddie first."

His mother laughed rather harshly: "Ye 're like an old woman with her first-born, man. When I 'm put away the tea-things I 'll just step down and call him home."

"Aw, well, it 's sixteen mile and more to Arisdale, so maybe I 'll better be going, then."

Coloring and smiling at his own foolish carefulness, he turned away and began to climb the slope behind the house, straight into the sunset. It was a strange, cold gleam of amber lights and gray cloud masses against a pale green sky. The yellow light of it bathed the brown heather and emerald mosses, bronzed the man's features, mellowed the patches of stark red earth with which the hill came to be more and more honeycombed towards the top. Suddenly the glow dropped behind the wavering outline of the hilltop and the whole slope was in

shadow. The crest grew black against the sky and the silhouette of a solitary sheep appeared there for a moment and then vanished.

After about twenty minutes' sharp climb he stood on the highest point of the hill. Behind him, to the eastward, lay the crescent-shaped toon and the voe. Far to the north and far to the south stretched an irregular, deeply-indented coast-line of cliffs, all softened now to a monotone of gray against the pallid blue of the ocean. The outlying islands were faintly hued, dim as dream-lands, and near the horizon was the shifting gleam from the Skerries.

Reluctantly Terval turned away landward into the heart of the long valley, narrow and deep, in which for many a mile a man might almost forget the presence of the sea. Even at the head of the vale Terval came under the benediction of its peace. Softly rounded, low slopes rose above shadowy ravines, wherein threads of rivulets, unseen till under foot, trickled into the placid burn that crept with floss-brimmed marge through the hollow of the hills. So still and so serpentine were the ways of its going that from above it looked like a string of wide pools, catching the last light of the evening. At the far end of the valley a single pale star wavered above the dim outlines of the hills. It seemed to stand,

thought Terval, just over the house whither he was bent.

He walked with long strides through the brown heather, noting in homely fashion, as a crofter must, the ear-marks of the sheep as they cried out and bounded away from him. But he often stopped for the fairness of the twilight, and hearkened to the thrilling tone-shower of the love-cry of the whaup. When the green sky had darkened into the blue of the night, and other stars were glittering over the hill-crests, he remembered with sudden gladness that it would be moonlight on the homeward journey.

Nearly halfway down the valley, near the ruins of the old Pictish huts, he came upon Osla standing by the burn.

He gave her a call, and she moved on at a line that presently crossed his own.

"I 'm seekin' our geese," she said. "I heard, the morn, they had flitted, and Bartle Hoseason saw some near the old houses yonder. I 'll just walk on wi' you a peerie bit."

"Did you look close in under the burn?" he asked her.

"Yea, yea," she answered. "And I canna see them all the way up. Still, we 'll just try."

"That we will," said he, but as her eyes roamed up and down the hillsides in a vain search for the

wanderers, his were bent upon her, full of pity. She was grown old these last weeks.

Perceiving that she had presently forgotten her quest, with a thought to turn her mind he said:

"There 's nothing, Osla, for giving a man a sense of the littleness of life like yon Picts' houses."

"What mean you?" she asked absently.

"Look you now, I sometimes go and sit there and think about the folk that built them. Here is their bit of doorway, yonder the drains that carried off the water from their earth floors. For the rest, it 's all mound and mossy stones washed down by the rain until there 's scarce one upon another, and in time the burn will get them all. I try to think what the people would be like, they little dark folk that huddled away from the sea and hid from our fathers, when they come sailing into the voe. I look at Joan Robertson sometimes" —

"And why Joan?" she asked, with a touch of interest.

"Because she 's the nearest to them of anybody I ken — a wee thing with pointed black eyes — is she no? But ye wouldna, maybe, have noticed that. Aye, aye, whiles I try to think o' them, huntin' and fishin' and with their cows and their sheep and all. Did they ken enough to burn the peats? Maybe Torf-Einar learned it from them. But they lived

and grew, and had bairns and bairns' bairns, and died; and no doubt they 're buried here in the valley, where their houses is gone to ruin. And never a trace of them more left on the sky and hills and the waters. I canna think what they were like — na, na; but I doubt they laughed and were sad, same 's ourselves."

Osla had nothing to say to that, and he continued:

"Twenty years ago I couldna make it out at all, why there should be this coming and going on the earth. A man here in Shetland lives his fourscore or fourscore and ten" —

"But whiles the young and strong are taken," said Osla softly.

"Yea, yea, and some of the old women sit by the fireside until they can scarce see or hear or speak — I used to think about it all and wonder that it should be so."

"What think you now?" asked Osla.

"Now? Just that it 's like the come and go of the seasons. Each in itself is good or maybe bad; but it 's the look of the whole that 's a beautiful thing — like the sea far away from the top of the Vord Hill."

"It 's maybe so," she said patiently. "The things that is must be the will o' God."

He waived that. "At least it is a help to re-

member those that 's gone and those that 's to come, when the way o' life is none so easy."

Again she was silent, and he stopped and peered in vain through the dim light for a huddle of white spots on the hill-slopes. When he looked at the woman again her dark eyes were bent upon him. "Terval," she said, "ye may well call all that your philosophy, as I 'm heard you say many a time; but my way o' life is just my Bible on my knee and somebody to do for. It doesna matter about anything else; and when a woman has lost her man and her bairns" —

"Osla," he said gently, "it was by your own will that you went back to Gardie."

"I ken fine," — her answer was sudden and fierce, — "but sorrow was upon me!"

"The Guest by the Hearth," said he, smiling to himself at the old thought. "She willna depart till ye have learned to love her, woman."

She made no answer to that; and Terval pondered a long while before he could bring to light the thought that was troubling him.

"Osla," he said at last, "would you be any happier now if I was to go away and leave ye to take care of mam and Christy?"

She looked at him in wonder. If the hills had leaped she could have been no more amazed.

"Ye ken that, Terval," she said when she was able to speak.

"Would ye so?" he asked, in a troubled way, and not as one who expects an answer. "But how about the responsibility, woman?"

"I'm more as willin'," she said, in the same breathless tone, as if she dreaded the trows or the old Picts overhearing.

"Aw — well, ye canna say but that a son's first duty is to his mother?"

"May be so," she granted. "But yet I ken well enough, Terval, — the thing ye 've been fightin' all these years. Let me go to the old woman."

"Come to Framgord — and welcome," said he. "But if I 'm to geng South, ye should make me see that it 's right."

"Right enough — right enough," she said eagerly; "but where 's the good of going over it all again? Ye ken fine what I would say."

"Maybe," he assented. "I 've gone over it times enough by myself. It isna just so easy to be rid of the thing altogether. She 's gettin' on better, Osla; I can trust her again. And now that the spring 's come — it 's always worst in the bad weather, ye ken. But she might break over any day; and the toon — it 's a fair wonder the toon doesna ken all by this time."

"No wonder at all," said Osla; "just your watching."

He seemed not to have heard. "And then — there 's wee Christy."

Sudden motherhood welled into Osla's eyes: "He would be like my own."

"Yea, yea; but he 's not of our people. Could ye make him a man, Osla?"

She bowed her head, unwilling to answer that.

"It isna that I 'm just so sure of doing much myself," he continued, "but — the bairn was left in my trust, ye ken. Na, na, I will like fine to see you at Framgord again, Osla, but you must come to us."

"Mam wouldna want me if she could have you," she said, with a touch of bitterness.

"You see," he answered gently; and she found herself trapped by her own words.

"Man, man!" she pleaded, as she had pleaded before.

"Yonder 's a patch of white in the hollow. I 'm thinkin' it will be your geese — so."

He was proceeding on his way when a sound from the woman he had left made him wheel swiftly and go back to her. He had never before heard her cry.

"Osla, woman," he said, with his hand on her shoulder.

In a moment she turned away, wiping her eyes and ashamed.

"There 's no way out of it," he said at last, with a heavy sigh. "We maun just wait — and wait."

"There is a way," she took him up swiftly, "and the way will be shown soon. I canna lose my faith in the rightness of the world."

All joy was gone from Arisdale now, and when Terval stood before the house — with the star that eight miles away had seemed to hang overhead, now far above the sea — he was almost minded to return home without going in.

But after all, things would be no better so. He entered and was made welcome, and while the old woman knitted and the son put a new handle to his spade, Terval and the old man wandered among memories and dreams as old as the first Norse folk who came to the island. And yet through all the world of fancy, with its fairies and wraiths and sea-monsters, there came surging into Terval's mind an undercurrent of pain and sorrow, the heritage of life unfulfilled — that never could find fulfillment.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE MOORS

THE moon was not far above the sea when Terval set out homeward. From the crown of one of the hills that sheltered and hid Jacob's cottage he looked down upon a great crescent of black land, with two jagged horns of rock bent inward, crab-like, as if trying to clutch the glittering water.

He came down to the road, stepped over one turf wall, and hesitated with a leg thrown over the other. The highroad was plain walking, though two miles longer; but the moors — the moors called him to-night.

A moment he paused to take his bearings, for the moon was passing into a great tract of cloud. If one had asked him for directions, he would have said, "Keep the old tumulus to your right until it hides the light on the Skerries, then go close to the mound and listen for the trickle of Pettaburn, and follow its bank with the water till you come to the gate of the Glebe Farm; after that, steer by the light of the window at Framgord — all the way round the voe." Perhaps he would scarcely have

thought to warn even a stranger, and yet the perils of such a night journey were sufficient. Aside from hidden bog-holes, where sheep were now and then entangled and stood helpless while the hoodie-crows came and picked out their eyes, there were still, dark pools in the shadow of high banks, and sudden gjos, that slit the land, where a careless step meant death in the foam three hundred feet below. But these dangers to life and limb never entered the head of the practiced moorsman.

Terval walked quickly and easily over the honey-combed earth, now trying it a little where it quaked hollow, before he stepped, now sinking ankle-deep in moss or loam. For all his sinuous course, leaping the countless wee burns that glittered white between him and the moon, and rounding dark pools on the far side, knowing their presence by memory or instinct, it was marvelous how soon he came to the old tumulus on the verge of the sea.

It was never without temptation that Terval drew near this place. He knew well enough that if he were to dig down through the oblong terraces he would find nothing more than a rust-eaten sword, a few links of chain-mail, perhaps a whalebone cup, perhaps even fragments of a skeleton; and yet he longed with unreasoning desire to evoke the spirit of the dead. Folk said the ground was cursed; and

no other Setter man dared go near by night. There were tales and to spare of the cattle that had been bedded on the cursed heather and straightway died; of the sheep that had fed upon the cursed grass and were eaten by rot; of the men that had looked into the opening at the top and were blotched over with terrible disease. Woe upon him, said folk, who laid hand upon the grass or the heather. Now, as always, Terval paused, musing, with his hands deep in his pockets against temptation. It would be a strange thing if a man were to make trial of this and watch the turn of fortune, good or bad. But the old hero — Viking, no doubt — was dead a thousand years ago — what could his curse do? And, after all, let the dead rest.

Strange, sorrowful thoughts were Terval's in those hours of the night. He bent his mind upon practical home matters, — the doings of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow; but the *old things* would not give him peace. Every gjo and every headland had its memories of drowned sailors, whose wraiths, if they were to rise from the sea, would cover the cliffs as with a mist. Yonder the Spanish treasure-ship, a hundred years ago, poured her silver among the tang and spout-fish; a man might dig at ebb-tide and win yet from the wealth of the Indies. In the sandy cove below a mermaid had

laid aside her sealskin for love of a fisherman. Folk said the tale was true; the man was Magnie Manson's grandfather's uncle. In the sea lay treasure and love, as well as the bodies of the drowned.

With an effort Terval tried to turn his mind to the proportion of bere and oats he would sow on the morrow, when in a sudden parting of the clouds Gloup Hall stood before him, tall and white on its hilltop. If ever ghosts or fairies were there, this was the time and the place to see them. Yonder was the field that fairies had delved and in anger sown with boulders. On the lower slope was Gretna Kirk, that men might never build, in that the heathen sprites of the old Norse temple tore down by night whatever was set up by day. And within the house itself were the ghosts of an ancient laird and of his idiot brother that he had buried alive between the two walls, and the ghost of the tall man who went into the house on Christmas Eve and never came out again, whose skeleton, seven feet long and more, lay doubled under the door-stone to this day. . . .

The great windows glittered in the moon and grew dark, and there was no ghost or fairy to be seen.

Terval had a sudden memory of his childhood's fear of the moors as his father carried him across in the darkness of frosty dawns, and a sudden

warm feeling at the heart when he thought of wee Christy snug in bed, safe from the black things of the night. . . .

The black thing, — the *Black Thing*, — even a man who was not superstitious must shiver a little when he came to the mound where the *Thing* slept by day, and from which it leaped forth at night to throttle those abroad this lonely way. It was all very well to whistle "Far in the mountains," it was still true that mishap came upon Olaf. As Terval turned the sharp bend near the mound, there crawled and slid and leaped from the ground under his feet the very horror that was in his thought. He stopped, and the *Thing* waited for him; and from the shadows of the hillside came a shrill cry.

He moved resolutely towards the *Thing*, and it fled before him. . . .

And then suddenly he had thrown back his head to laugh; for the moon was behind him, and the *Thing* was his own shadow. Never in the world might a man escape from that.

But the cry — was that a shadow too? — the silent voice of the hills? Terval stood deliberating, his eyes sharp for any moving thing on the slopes above. The moors seemed as empty as the sky and the sea.

He moved on uncertainly, stopped, retraced his steps, and resolutely took to the broken land. In a world of shadows a man could but use his eyes as well as he might.

He remembered well the point from which the wail had seemed to come, and he climbed steadily, having in view a definite radius of exploration. And so strange are the ways of men's minds that before he reached the boulder by which he was steering, all the troublous and passionate undercurrent of Terval's life bubbled up through the surface thought, and he said to himself distinctly, "This shall be a sign: a man who follows shadows in the night is no fit person to decide for his own life and the lives of others."

Yet — even as he said it — he knew that all signs would be powerless against his resolve.

He reached the boulder and began to run his eyes over every inch of the circle he had marked out. When he came to the sheen of moonlight on a pool he felt no surprise at a gleam of red and white emerging from the shadow of the further bank.

He found himself running and saying to himself, as if to another, "It 's a fairy — or a changeling — stolen — long ago — long ago." . . .

Then he stood dumb, looking down at a little

child's dimpled palm and sleeve of red flannel in the loam that bordered the murderous pool.

He must have been rough with the boy, for Christy shrieked out terror-stricken words about Broonie.

. . . . . .

The moorit lamb — her wee moorit lamb — out among the hills! And he had asked for a sign!

"How came you here, laddie?" he said quietly, as he gathered the bairn well within his coat and turned homeward.

He was frightened, said Christy, — frightened of grannie, and he had seen Uncle Terval go over the hills and thought to follow — till the night came on — and he hid from Broonie. . . .

"What was it with grannie?" asked Terval again.

But the boy hid his face and would not answer.

And in the circling of the voe Terval knew, as he had never known before, that while he held in his arms the wee moorit lamb, the world outside could give him nothing half so dear.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT MEGGY-BETTY DISCOVERED AT FRAMGORD

A BRIGHT light was streaming from the open door of Framgord when the gate creaked beneath Terval's hand, and black against the light was a short, clumsy figure, not his mother's.

"Meggy-Betty?"

"Terval," she began, her pleasant, husky voice full of anxiety, "where 's the bairn? Ah, you 've found him!" Her relief was genuine, and caused the man to look at her with pleased eyes.

"Where 's my mother?" he asked, as they entered the kitchen together.

"Asleep," she answered, without looking at him, and held out her arms to take the drowsy child.

But with a slight gesture of refusal Terval walked up to the bed, still carrying the boy, and looked down in silence.

Presently he returned to the fire with little change of expression beyond a slight deepening of the lines; and, at Meggy-Betty's second appeal,

gave the child to her without speaking. Then he went away and brought back Christy's nightgown, and stood leaning against the mantel-shelf while she made the little one ready for bed.

Christy was too sleepy to protest. He only drooped, sighing, from side to side, as she thrust his little limp arms into the sleeves of his nightgown and struggled with the knots of his bootlaces.

"Do you no think, Terval," she asked presently, "that he should have a corn o' hot milk, just to keep off cold?"

"Na, na, there 's no need," began Terval, but added hastily, "Perhaps it would be better — he 's no Norseman."

He brought milk and heated it; and between them they managed to wake the child enough to get him to drink a little. Once roused, he studied Meggy-Betty with a long stare, then silently held out his arms to his uncle; and when Terval took him again, cuddled close with a deep sigh of content. His heavy eyes wandered from the man's ruddy face and broad, fair beard, to the little gold rings in his ears; and presently one baby hand strayed up to catch the firelight on the shining gold, and so played until the child fell asleep again.

"I think I 'll be goin' home now," said Meggy-Betty, feeling rather in the way, as she stood by Terval's side. He looked up as if he had quite forgotten her presence.

"Bide a peerie while," he said, "I want to ask you some questions."

She shifted her weight uneasily from one foot to the other; but at last, at his gesture, sat down upon the settle opposite.

"What do you ken about — this? How did she get the drink? What brought you here?"

She laughed a little from sheer nervousness; and her fingers reached mechanically for the knitting that was usually tied about her waist. Not finding it, she plucked at her skirt as she talked.

"I canna answer them all at once, Terval; but — but I was at the post office and I met Davie Smith, you ken, about — about — well, maybe about nine o'clock, and he was just come from Framgord, he said."

Terval frowned, but said nothing.

"He asked me where you was, and grinned in such a queer way that I thought maybe all wasna right, so — so — I came up."

"And you found — ?"

"He must have brought it to her, from Burra

maybe. She wasna expectin' to see any one, and she couldna put it away before I came in."

"What did she say?"

"No much. She wasna overpleased to see me."

Terval uttered a curious little sound between a groan and a grunt, and tried to turn it into a laugh. "It 's Davie's doing — the daft creature. And how she 's paid him they two only know. Did ye ken about this before, Meggy-Betty?"

She shook her head. "Nobody kens but me, Terval; and I 'm no tellin' any one."

He did not look into her honest, homely eyes; his own were full of shame, and he bent them upon the child as he said slowly: —

"It was my own fault. I shouldna have stayed away so long. But she promised to go and bring home the laddie. And she had been right for six months and more" —

"I was that anxious about him," said Meggy-Betty, "but I didna say anything to other folk. She couldna tell where you was, and I thought maybe you was seekin' him. I just went home and told Magnie your mother wasna well and you was away, and come back again."

"Why did you come back?"

"Aw, well, I couldna leave her alone; and I

thought somebody might happen in, as I did, and " —

Terval was seeking for words in which to thank her, and could not find them; while she, for her part, was longing to tell him something of her thoughts of him, but sat tongue-tied. At length she broke the embarrassing silence by mumbling, " I must go."

With this his tongue was loosened, and without preface or pause he plunged hurriedly through the sad story; but in the end he shrank from the sympathy in her eyes, and added hastily, " I 'll put Christy to bed, and then follow you home."

" There 's no need," she retorted, being all unused to that attention. " I 'm right enough, and you shouldna leave they two alone."

Terval made no further protest. He watched her as she drew her hap close, wondering if he should demand more wretched details of the scene between her and his mother, and feeling sure that much lay behind her simple words.

But her mind turned upon another matter. " I ken better now, Terval, why you canna go to Norway."

But he would not talk of this. " How 's all at home ? " he asked.

" Well, thanks." She hesitated a second before

adding, "I 'm trying to get dad to take a cottage wi' me; but he 's afraid we canna manage by ourselves."

"How 's that?" he asked, with quick interest.

"Well, you ken, there was one — the Mouats' — but it 's taken now. Maybe the Sandisons will be goin' to Whalsey; and if they do, and I can talk dad over" —

"Could you manage?"

"Aye, that we could — well enough. Dad could help about the garden and with the animals; and with my spinning and knitting, and the gutting in the summer, we could make do fine. Magnie's house is over full now."

"That it is. It 's a pity you couldna have got the Mouats' croft."

"It were Joram spoke for that." She could not repress a slight blush when she mentioned this name, but Terval did not notice her agitation.

"I ken. He 's going to marry Sunniva Hoseason, I hear," he added indifferently.

Then rose in Meggy-Betty's heart a wicked wish — a wish for which she chid herself afterwards — that some one would tell him how Joram had sought her first. But all she said was, "Yea, yea, that 's true."

"Good luck to him," he said, smiling a little,

" and to all who do the same. But I wish you could have had that house, Meggy-Betty; it 's a good house."

" Magnie offered to pay the rent the first year; but I wouldna hear to it — it wouldna have pleased Laura — maybe. And I couldna bring dad to think that we could win through. But there 's maybe other houses in the world," she continued, with her broad smile.

" The neighbors would have helped you at the first," he said, still pursuing the point. " It 's a pity — a pity ! "

" Well," she shrugged, " I canna help it now."

" Na, that you canna. But we must see to it that you have the next house, Meggy-Betty — you and your father."

She looked at him in sudden, grateful surprise, and they smiled at each other.

" If you wants me at any time, Terval, if there 's anything I can do " —

" I dona think there is anything, Meggy-Betty," he said slowly.

She hesitated a while at the door before she added, " I was thinkin' that if ever you saw your way clear to goin', and if you would just rent this croft to us, ye ken, we could look after your mother and the bairn."

Though his eyes were very kind upon her, he clasped the sleeping child a little closer and shook his head.

But she knew that he was pleased with her, and tramped home through the darkness more than content.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PLEA OF THE LASSES

"I WISH," said wee Lizzie, standing in Osla's doorway, "I wish you would come to Joan."

Osla sat with a huge heap of matted wool at her feet, busy with the cards. Her hands were greased with fish-oil, for she was hard at work; but she put her face forward for a kiss, and said, as the child clung about her neck: —

"What 's wrong wi' Joan?"

"I dona ken," said the little girl, wide-eyed.

"Where 's daddy?"

"He 's dellin'."

"Why, lamb, he finished dellin' last week, did he no?"

"Aye, but he 's dellin' at Aywick for Peter McKay."

"So!" said Osla, remembering that Peter McKay was laid up with rheumatism there, and that delving advances but slowly with only a wife and daughter to do it. She made a mental note to go over, that very day, and ask if he had tried *porious plaisters;* and if not, to send him one.

"What 's Joan doin' ? " she asked Lizzie.

But the child only repeated "Come!" and tugged at her arm.

So Osla washed her hands and put on a clean apron, and went across the valley.

At the door she paused, the child still clinging to her hand, and noted at once that something was gone wrong with Joan's housekeeping. Although it was near mid-day, the dishes were not washed, the box-bed was tumbled, a stray hen was reaping a harvest of crumbs by Joan's chair.

With her swift, silent step Osla came up behind, and throwing her arms about Joan's neck, tried to draw the untidy head to her breast. But the girl, though passive a moment from sheer surprise, quickly resisted and drew away.

"Joan, my darling!"

Joan looked at her resentfully, with dull, swollen eyes over her flushed, tear-stained cheeks. Osla saw at once that she had wept until there were no more tears, but seemed to notice nothing as she busied her hands with the girl's loose hair, which she eyed with much disfavor. She began to pull out the slipping hairpins and to bring down the whole mass.

"Where 's thy comb ? " she asked abruptly.

"Don't ! " protested Joan, jerking herself away.

"I kens where the comb are," piped up wee Lizzie, and brought it in triumph.

Then Osla began to draw it slowly through the thick, fine hair, careful not to pull at any tangle or in any way to lessen the soothing effect. Having combed and brushed it for some while in silence, she began to plait it, preparatory to putting it up again.

"I wish you was my mother!" burst from Joan, in a sharp cry.

Osla dropped the braid she was making, and again held the girl close.

"Tell me," she whispered. "Call me thy mother if du will."

But it seemed that only choking sobs were in Joan's throat.

"Lizzie," said the older woman, feeling in her pocket, "here 's a ha'penny for thee and one for Christy. Run up to Framgord and take it till him, or buy some sweeties for you both. So, lassie."

Then Osla drew up a chair, held both the girl's icy hands in hers, and waited.

"I canna tell father!" came presently, in a tone of defiance.

"Well?" Osla considered this for a while, then said, "Du must wash thy face, then, lass, and put the house right afore he comes home till his dinner."

"He 's no comin' home till tea-time," said Joan, and no more.

"So — so," was the patient answer.

Then the girl buried her face in Osla's lap, with sudden, hysterical sobs. "It 's all — just — about a wedding!" she cried, in a smothered voice.

Osla did not know what to say to that, so wisely said nothing.

"I 'm had a letter the day," continued Joan, and drew it out of her pocket. "I 'm goin' to burn it."

She put it into Osla's hand; but Osla, when she had smoothed it out carefully, said, "Read it to me, Joan; I 'm no got my specs."

"I canna," said the girl. "Father's specs are somewhere about. Maybe on the shelf by the dresser."

But Osla had no mind to read strange writing, if she could avoid it. Wullie's she knew, every stroke, and she could manage with Nenie's, but a stranger's — that would be a different matter. It was long since she had been at the school, and it was not the same as making out a sheep on the hillside. . . .

Joan suddenly snatched the sheet from her, and read steadily through it. Osla made no comment, though the girl's voice grew by turns hard, passionate, and despairing, but kept her face calm and steady.

"Well?" asked Joan at length, still holding the paper suspended, and looking at her with bated breath, as one looks at a judge for sentence.

"Well, my lamb," said Osla, "I 'm thinking that folk in this world are pretty much the same, in Shetland or out of Shetland."

"What mean you?"

"I mean, the man wasna intendin' to be a villain," she insisted.

"Na, na," was the dry answer, "but he 's broke my heart, and it doesna matter."

She crushed the letter into a ball and dropped it among the peat ashes. And still Osla was quiet.

"I 'm listened to this letter," she said gently, "and I find only that, minister or no minister, he 's over-much like all lads of his age. He tells thee honestly, Joan, that he was mistaken — he didna ken his own mind. And now — there 's another. It 's no his fault — exactly — a lad must be a lad. What will du do, Joan?"

No answer.

"Will du hold him to his promise, as he offers thee — and him lovin' another woman?"

No answer.

"I 'm no saying, lamb, that he 's justified. I say, 'Shame upon him for no bein' sure o' his mind

before he askit thee!' He 's no fit yet for the care of other souls who cannot keep his own. But it 's a thing, lassie, that happens more 's du could think. If God made men fickle, and gave thee a constant heart, du should be thankful, and have charity to them."

No answer.

"Du 'll write till him," pleaded Osla, "and say that du bears him no malice."

"Na."

"And that du 'll no stand between him and the other" —

"Na."

"— woman; and that du 's glad to hear he 's got another kirk. And that du 'll aye think on him kindly" —

"Na."

"Du 'll do none o' this things? Then what will du do?"

"I 'll find — I 'll find something," muttered Joan.

"Lass, du 's a peerie bairn in this things. Has du no faith enough in me to believe me when I say" — But Joan was not listening at all.

Osla began again: "Look at me, Joan. Am I any different as I was last year?"

As the girl lifted up her eyes, half unwillingly,

she noticed for the first time the lines and wrinkles that had grown in Osla's thin face, noticed the streaks of gray hair in front of the hap, noted the faintness of the color in her face. It seemed as if she had laid aside her rosy cheeks together with her crimson tie.

Joan's eyes filled with swift sympathy, and she took the other woman's knotty hands in hers.

"I ken, I ken," she said softly.

"Du 's no the only woman in the toon that 's lost him she loves," said Osla, in a hushed voice.

But presently Joan protested, though with less rebellion : —

"You had your man, Osla ; and when he went to sea his love was still yours ; and you could love him all the years that he was away — always. Na, it 's no the same as he had loved you once, and then — soon as he went away — forgot you for another. I could have borne it." . . .

"Du 'll bear it now," said Osla firmly, "like thy father's brave lass. If he found another so soon, it 's maybe that he never loved thee at all."

Joan put her hands up to her face with a little cry, remembering all at once their trysting at the Laxaburn.

"I want thee to promise me something."

"Na!"

"If du 'll no write to him, — yet a while, — as I bade thee, — at least — promise " —

"I 'll promise nothing," was the sullen answer.

"Promise me just — no to do anything without coming to ask me first; promise that when the trouble 's upon thee heavy, du 'll come to me with it, same 's " —

"Na, na, I canna! "

"Same 's I was thy mother."

Then Joan broke into tears again, and flung both arms around Osla's neck. "Oh, I wish du was my mother! I wish du was my mother! " she sobbed again and again.

There was a scraping sound on the doorstep, and a slight noise, as of one clearing the throat. Osla turned and saw Jimmy Robertson standing there, with his scythe on his shoulder. And all the way home, and long after that, the look on his face haunted her.

CHAPTER XXIX

ERIC WINS

It was a hard battle that Osla was fighting in her cottage that night, and for several days afterwards. It was Jimmy's need of her, and Joan's and Lizzie's, contending with the memory of Eric. There was no reason why she should not leave her lonely house and go to care for them — except that she was Eric's wife and could not be another man's. Wife — not widow. She kept forgetting her widowhood and let her thoughts stray to sea, in vague wonder — when would he come? So she often fell into day-dreaming, until with a shock there would rise before her an image of the cask that had brought word of him to her from the dead. . . .

Thus she struggled between reason and instinct, and at first could find no help. At one time she thought of going to the minister; but told herself that she must not burden him with her trouble — his wife was failing fast, it was whispered about. Perhaps her own heart told her that he was not the one to help her. He might be sorry — but he could not speak with the voice of authority,

and it was blank, indisputable authority that she wanted.

Terval was the only other person in the toon to whom she might turn; but he was busy with the delving of his five acres, and was in sore trouble with his mother. The delving he did alone, for hired help was impossible; and with more pride than most people, he refused all offers of neighborly assistance, even her own. The old woman was seldom seen, but the drink had its claws in her, and now and then she fought for it so fiercely that she offered to sell her household goods, her very clothes, for a little. Notwithstanding Terval's care the secret got abroad, so that his pride was humbled to the dust, although even then he did not know that the most savory morsel of the gossip, to women of Laura Manson's type, was the belief in his own harshness and cruelty to the old woman.

Osla made up her mind that she must settle the question, and finally, for herself.

She was thinking about it one evening on her way home from the far end of the voe. She had been on an errand of charity. A poor, good-for-nothing woman, long ago betrayed and abandoned by a Scotch cooper who came thither for the fishing, lay dying in a wretched half-cottage, depend-

ent for her very existence upon the bounty of the neighbors. Magnie Manson supplied her with peats, Meggy-Betty and Laura carried her food and looked in as often as they could to see that she was comfortable. Other neighbors brought her bedding or washed her clothes, or kept the room tidy; but among them all it was lonely Osla who had the most time to give and who gave it most freely.

There was a memorable sunset this night, as she rounded the voe, — no rainbow brightness in the west, but a wide glow of pale rose deepening here and there into crimson. The hills beyond the voe were greenish black against the sky, and the water was a gray mirror full of rosy clouds. So deep was the silence that the sudden swoop and splash of a solitary diver for fish was almost startling. Osla walked as softly as she could in her heavy boots, from a reluctance to break the peace around her. Even remote sounds were curiously distinct, — the wheels of the mail-gig on the Burra road, the voice of a woman calling her cow, far up the hillside.

There was a sudden rattle of wood in some invisible boat below the banks, and the sound of scraping shingle as it was pushed into the water. A bend in the road brought Osla within sight of

boat and boatman. It was Jimmy Robertson, with his face turned upward at the noise of advancing footsteps.

"Come down," he called, with an attempt at ease. "I 'll take you home."

Osla flushed and stood uncertain. It was a long way by road and she was tired; and across the voe it was less than half the distance. She would have gone unhesitatingly with Magnie Manson or any other neighbor — well, was Jimmy Robertson so different? She tugged at her hap a moment, then began to scramble down the slippery rocks to the shingle.

"It 's a pity the old pier 's gone," said Jimmy, looking at the broken wall of masonry that marked its site.

Then she saw that several feet of water lay between her and the boat.

"You 'll have to be carried," he continued, with an embarrassed smile. But her bright eyes turned upon him with the startled gleam of a wild thing.

"No I!" said she quickly; and before he could move or speak she had plucked up her skirts, waded to her knees, and scrambled aboard.

He followed, rather crestfallen, got the boat off, and took to the oars, with Osla in the stern, composedly eyeing her wet boots.

"You 'll catch your death, maybe," he said, with an attempt at severity.

"No me," she retorted, with her swift, amused laugh, adding, "What was you doing across the voe, this time o' day?"

"Me? There was some boxes come by steamer for Mester Brown, and he asked me to put them across."

"She was very late, the day" — meaning the steamer.

"Aye."

"I was been to see Annie Johnson."

"So?"

"She 's goin' off, poor object!"

"So?" He was clearly not much interested.

Suddenly the splash of his oars ceased, and the boat stopped in the middle of the voe, where the rosy lights reflected from the water cast a strange glow over the faces of the two neighbors.

"Osla, what shall I do with my poor lass?"

She closed her lips tightly and looked seaward, where the giant cliffs of Fetlar towered between the misty sea and pale sky.

"What shall I do with her?" he insisted.

"Be good to her," she answered at last, in a low, uncertain voice.

"I try to be that." His tone expressed some degree of indignation.

"I ken — I believe it well, Jimmy," she soothed him. "She needs it all, for" — she caught at the next words, but too late to recall them — "she has no mother."

Her heart leaped as she saw the advantage she had given him — an advantage that he was not slow to take.

"I heard what she said to you, Osla, last time you was in our house" —

"So I thought," she answered, with as much coolness as she could muster.

"Osla, Osla," he pleaded, "will you never see my need o' you? Will you never take pity on me and the bairns? We 're needin' you bad, Osla!"

Again she turned her face seaward, seeking strength for the answer.

"If it was only a question of pity, Jimmy," she began slowly, "but you ken I 'm a married woman, — I 'm been married once, and I never could feel that I could be married to any one else same 's I was to Eric."

"There 's a good few" — he would have said.

"I ken that," she interrupted, with just a trace of contempt.

"But if you 's a widow," he tried again, "and I 'm a widow man" —

She was suddenly near to sobbing, but held her

breath until she could speak quietly, then said, with only so much emotion as was indicated by longer pauses between the words: —

"I 'm — over — new — yet — to — bein' — a widow."

Jimmy stared at her with profound amazement, for like the rest of the toon, save Terval, he knew nothing of the cask. But some vague feeling told him that he was near dangerous ground, and also that the children were his strongest plea. He repeated plaintively: —

"What am I to do with Joan?"

Receiving no answer, he began to row again, as the rosy light faded to dull gray and the shadows grew heavy on the hill-slopes. The cliffs of Fetlar had disappeared, though Osla's eyes were still bent steadily in their direction.

"I 'm afraid she 'll make away with herself," he continued, in the same monotone. "She has a look that makes me feel that she needs watchin' all the time, and I canna watch her, for I must win our bread. Do you mind the lass at Colvidale?"

Osla moved her shoulders slightly. The girl had gone mad when her sweetheart deserted her; and after wandering over the wild places of the island day after day through the dreary winter, with the coming of spring had drowned herself — was found

lying face downward in a pool so small that part of her dress was quite dry.

"Joan 's no such fool," she tried to say boldly; but her heart sank within her.

"I canna tell," answered the father mournfully. "I canna tell."

Then there was silence between them as he drove the boat past the gulls on the end of the frail wooden pier up to the stone landing-steps.

She scrambled out, unaided, and watched him as he fastened the boat to its iron ring; then said huskily, "If anything could move me, Jimmy, to change my mind, it 's the thought o' your bairns, but"—

She stopped abruptly, and turned away towards the road.

"Have you been to the post-office since the steamer come?" he called after her.

"Na," she answered, in a muffled voice. "I 'm no havin' letters from my bairns the day."

He had no suspicion of how deeply she was touched, or how near she was to yielding. As she walked away homeward through the twilight her footing, firm and assured, instinctively avoiding every stone, gave no sign of weakness.

She passed on rather slowly, in a tumult of feeling, through which there struggled into birth

a prayer for right guidance along this difficult way.

There came a sound of swift footsteps behind her, and Robertson again called her name. "I 'm got a letter for you," he panted, as she waited for him to come up.

They tramped along, side by side, in silence, her mind now turning in speculation upon her letter, — the handwriting was strange, — apparently to the exclusion of everything else; yet when they came within range of the light shining from his window, by some strange silent process he had again asked his question and she had again given her answer.

"Osla?"

"Good-night. God keep you and the bairns," was all she could say.

She went home with quicker step, almost light of heart, now that the moment of decision in her own mind had come and gone.

She lighted her lamp and, bending close to the pale, blotted writing of her letter, managed by degrees to get at the meaning of it.

When she understood fully, she hid her face in her hands in thankfulness that her way was clear and appointed.

The letter was an appeal from an aunt of her husband's. She was the last of her family except

an only son, and he, like his father and grandfather before him, had been drowned at sea. Would Osla take her?

"I 'll go to Lerwick by the next steamer and bring her home," was Osla's quick resolve. "But I 'll be good to Jimmy's poor lasses, oh, aye, I 'll be good to them all!"

With all her tender pity for them, with all her sorrow for the old woman's loss, her heart was serene — even glad — glad that it could not be free to win away from the husband of her young life; glad of the duty laid upon her; and glad that her resolve was sealed by a tie of his. It was almost like another message from him she had lost so long ago.

CHAPTER XXX

WHAT THE STEAMER BROUGHT

THE following Friday Osla was busy with her preparations for going to Lerwick, when the steamer came in from the South. At the sound of the whistle she dropped her mending and went to the doorway to watch the unloading. There was one passenger in the flit-boat, a man whom with her long sight she at once took to be a stranger and a tourist — rather surprising this, so early in the spring.

Terval Saemundson also watched the steamer as she came into the voe. He was delving, and as soon as he paused and leaned on his spade, Christy was about his knee, clamoring to be picked up and carried. Terval also scrutinized the flit-boat, but he was further away, and could make out little about the man in the stern.

When he was about to resume his digging, it came over him that it was near tea-time, and that he was very tired. So he caught the peerie boy and set him on his shoulder, with an earth-stained little bare foot on each side of his neck, and began to trot up to the house. Christy had long ago learned that the

broad golden beard served admirably for reins, and was not slow to make use of it.

They were both flushed and laughing, Terval with great pretence at puffing and exhaustion, when they reached the door of the but-end. But after a glance within, Terval reached up two big hands and brought the boy down with a somersault that made him scream with delight and fear, and said with sudden soberness : —

" Run and bring home the kye, Christy ; I doubt there 's no milk for tea."

The laddie hopped away with a last elvish " Catch me ! " — which was attempted with but little spirit by his uncle.

Terval watched him for a moment — an odd little figure in the red flannel shirt that had been his own when he was a much bigger boy, a quaintly cut velveteen jacket of the same period, and trousers in heavy rolls about the knees, patched at intervals with bare skin. These garments had been found in an old sea-chest, not opened for many years until then ; and they served Christy for daily attire after the clothes in which he first came had been partly outworn and partly outgrown. Terval had bought him at the shop a ready-made suit for Sundays ; and it was his plan, though he saw no immediate prospect of being able to carry it out, to

take him to Lerwick and fit him out there, afterwards degrading the Sunday suit to daily wear, and discarding altogether the curious attire in which he now flitted about like a red-headed, red-breasted hummingbird.

When Christy had gone, Terval went up to the padded chair by the fire and stood by his mother's side. He had been away from the house at his delving perhaps three hours. What was the use of trying? He laid his hand on her shoulder and shook her slightly, but with no effect beyond that of sending her head over against the opposite side of the chair.

Thus he left her, and knelt with the bellows to revive the dying fire, hung the kettle on the crane, brought out cups and saucers, scones and oatcakes, an untidy lump of butter, and set them promiscuously on the oilcloth-covered table. When Christy returned with the cows, he milked them, the boy very proudly holding the head of each in turn, though the staid animals were rather insulted by the restraint. Then the two went in and had their tea together.

Christy asked no questions about his grandmother; he was becoming wise for his years. He was content to drink his tea as silently as his big uncle.

Afterwards, without stopping to clear away the dishes, Terval lighted his pipe, and holding out a hand to Christy, set off for the field again. He wanted to see exactly how much ground was unturned, and whether he could finish the work on the morrow.

But he did not reach the field. As he laid his hand on the garden gate, he became aware of a man walking briskly up the road, — a man whom he at once knew, — a stranger from the South, — more than that. . . .

He stared and bit hard at his pipe. The lad was busy tormenting Wag, and saw nothing.

"Christy," said Terval, still holding his pipe as if he had forgotten that it could be removed, "run back into the house and bide till I come."

Christy lifted a protesting face; but read in his uncle's eyes no encouragement to disobey, so did slowly as he was bidden.

Then Terval, with pipe in mouth and hands clasped behind his back, awaited the man, as he came up smiling, with an outstretched hand which the Shetlander did not see.

"I have waited long enough, I think," said Christopher Holmes. "She is here, is n't she?"

"Aye," began Terval slowly, and stopped to consider his answer. "Aye, she has been here."

"She misled me at first," said Holmes, resting his gloved hands on the paling of the gate. "I 've been wandering pretty much over Europe to find her."

"I know," said Terval coldly. "I know all about it; but I had forgotten you."

Holmes looked at him, puzzled at his manner: "I suppose I might have come sooner, but" —

"There was no need of that," said Terval, smiling faintly. And then Holmes, too, seemed to find speech suddenly difficult. He fidgeted with the gate, until Terval said at length: —

"Well, what is it you want?"

"Want?" repeated Holmes, with a nervous laugh. "Well — naturally — I want to take her back with me — her and the children."

"You want to take them back?"

"Why, man, of course. I — I 'm not altogether a cad. There were some little difficulties — with my mother — and I 'm afraid Barbara was unhappy; but I 've made that all right. There won't be anything more of the sort."

"No," said Terval, and his tone softened in spite of himself. "No, that there will not."

A look of alarm crossed the Englishman's face. "What do you mean? She 's — she 's here, you say? She 's — quite well? Where are they?"

Terval's eyes wandered from the face before him towards the toon, along the road to the kirk, and beyond. . . .

"Did you ask no questions when you came ashore?" he inquired stolidly.

"Of the boatmen? No. Why should I? I thought it was better — where is she?"

"What you called your wife," said Terval, with his eyes still on the kirkyard, "is yonder. My sister's soul — I canna tell you." He was unaware of his slip into the vernacular.

Holmes grew pale, yet seemed not to understand. "The boy? The baby?" he muttered, as one in a dream, and put his hand up to his head. Then in the silence that followed, it seemed that the truth swept over him, for with a groan he buried his face in his hands.

"Will you come into the house?" asked Terval, with a grim smile. But just at the door his heart failed him. He paused and stretched out his arm across it, as if to bar this stranger from the sight within, and called, "Christy!"

The picturesque little figure came tumbling forth under the outstretched arm, and Wag followed. The dog at once made for the stranger, in an excess of curiosity rather than fierceness. And when Terval looked up from quieting him, the child was

staring hard at his father with a certain vague recognition in his eyes.

"Christy," said Holmes, in a thick voice, "don't you know papa?"

But the boy with one hand clung to Terval's trousers, and drew back; and put the other up to hide his face.

Terval stooped and with his handkerchief brushed off the smears of butter and jam, — Christy had been busy during his short absence, — much as a fussy mother dabs at her child before company.

In the silence, there was a sound in the room — something between a moan and a yawn. At once Terval straightened himself, as if involuntarily, and stood so that his great bulk filled the doorway; then with a swift sense of shame at the instinct to conceal, withdrew to one side.

But Holmes saw neither the act nor the withdrawal. "Come to me, Christy," he said, and tried to gather the reluctant boy into his arms; but almost at once the laddie wriggled away to his uncle.

"Where is —?"

"With her mother," said Terval gently.

Holmes turned abruptly, walked away almost like one blind, until his hand touched the wall, and there stopped.

"Laddie, run away and play with Olë Manson a

peerie while," said Terval. And when the boy had gone, reluctant and suspicious with childhood's wisdom, Terval followed Holmes and said gently, "Will you come into the house? I 'm sorry I cannot ask you to stop the night."

"I 'm stopping at White's. I shall go back with the steamer to-morrow."

"Will you take Christy with you?"

At the surprised "Of course!" that followed, Terval clenched his hands, but added with deliberation: "I did — not — know — that you would care — to be reminded of — of" —

"I shall take him," was the quick answer. "He does not love me now; but in time he will — in time. Meanwhile, I can at least educate him and clothe him."

Probably he intended no insult; but Terval's face burned; and for a time he could not trust himself to speak. However, at last he said, and quite dispassionately: —

"He is very well here — stronger than when he came; and seems happy. You would not perhaps leave him a little while, until he is older?"

"What did she — she say?"

"She left it with you. You were to have him if you came and wanted him. But I think," he added grimly, "she wished you might never come."

"Then the question is settled," said Holmes, disregarding the last statement.

"I hoped to make a man of him," said Terval quite as coldly, "such a man as his mother might have been proud of; but with the southern blood in his veins, it might be — might be difficult. Perhaps it 's just as well to give him up now."

He turned to go in. No confession of love for Christy passed, or ever would pass, his lips.

"I 'll see that he is ready for to-morrow's steamer. Will you — ?"

His sentence was interrupted by the appearance of his mother in the doorway. Holmes looked at her: this untidy woman in her half-unbuttoned dress, with her gray hair straggling about her ears, her face flushed, and her eyes feverish — Barbara's mother. His dazed look changed to one of contempt, and Terval read the expression rightly. It said as plainly as words: —

"I 've come only just in time to get the boy out of this."

Before Terval's mind there flashed an image of the other man's mother, as Barbie had described her to him: clear-featured and dainty, with her rich lace caps, her jeweled fingers — the lady called Gwendolen.

The old woman did not appear to recognize her

son-in-law. She looked at him, mumbling indistinct words, until Terval took her by the arm and led her back into the house. Holmes's eyes followed them and beheld the untidy tea-table, and a chair that Christy had strewn with crumbs.

In a moment Terval came back; and his brother-in-law tried to say civilly, "Your mother" — he ignored her relationship to himself — "is not well?"

"My mother," said Terval slowly, his face wearing the hard, compressed look with which he disguised pain, "has unfortunately" — there was a long pause — "is unfortunately — has become addicted to drink."

Holmes said nothing. So this was his wife's mother. He had seen the woman with different eyes long ago, when first he met Barbara. Had she lived, would he have looked upon her too with changed eyes? But she was dead — his bright-haired Norse Barbara — dead. . . .

"I should like to-morrow" — he steadied his voice as well as he could — "to hear more. To-night, I cannot — I cannot" —

Yet Terval with gentle coldness and brevity insisted upon relating to him the things that had happened; and they parted with scarcely more words. And later Terval stood in the doorway,

watching Christopher Holmes as he walked slowly around the voe to the little kirkyard where Barbara Saemundson, daughter of Vikings, lay among her forefathers, her grave marked only by an old cross cut perhaps for one of them a thousand years ago.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHAT THE STEAMER TOOK AWAY

In the morning, while Terval was dressing little Christy in the best that he had, he heard the far-away whistle of the steamer at Burra. She should be at Setter in three quarters of an hour.

He went down to the gate, leaving the child absently pulling the cat's tail, while the animal weakly protested, but loved him too well to withdraw. Almost at once the boy rose with a cry, and ran after his uncle. It seemed as if he feared to lose sight of him even for a moment.

Holmes was hurrying up the road. There was no time for explanations.

"Is he ready?"

"Yes," said Terval, "but there 's one thing I must say." He fumbled in his pocket and brought out two Bank of Scotland pound notes.

"What 's this?" asked the other man, staring.

"For the boy's outfit in Lerwick."

"Nonsense! I won't take it," said Holmes, withdrawing a step.

"You will do me the favor of buying whatever is necessary. I have not had the time myself."

"Put it away!" growled Holmes. "He 's my own child." But Terval was immovable.

"You will take it," he insisted, "or — for the present — I keep the boy — until the matter can be arranged."

Holmes could not help smiling. The thing was too absurd. "Make me go to law — eh?" he asked.

Terval shrugged. "If you don't take it — you will have bother enough."

They looked at each other, until in the end the father, both disgusted and shamed, took the money.

Terval was staring straight before him, seemingly indifferent to the fact that the child was sobbing about his knees, and that Holmes was vainly trying to draw him away. At last he roused himself and lifted the boy in his arms, kissing him on forehead and lips, and murmuring, "Shame upon thee, my wee man! Du 's greeting like a peerie bairn. What would thy mother say?"

Then he turned to the father, at the same time trying to loosen the little arms that clung close: "If there 's anything more that you wish to know — there 's no time now."

Holmes made a quick gesture as if he intended to speak. Terval waited, but as nothing came, presently resumed, "If there 's anything you wish particularly to know, you can write to me — at any time."

"Yes — I can't talk about it yet," said Christy's father.

The boy was passed, struggling and screaming, from the one to the other; yet he was more quickly consoled than might have been supposed. Terval watched the two of them going along the road together: Holmes was bending down towards the child's eagerly uplifted face, and Christy never once looked back.

"Southern blood," he muttered to himself, as he went back into the house.

The but-end was hardly cheerful with its litter of dishes; its zinc bath, in which the boy had been scrubbed an hour before, still full of soapy water; with its wet towel lying in a heap on the hearth, together with Christy's old clothes; with the old woman still asleep in the box-bed.

Terval picked up the red flannel shirt, the velveteen jacket, the trousers, folded them carefully, and after a moment's consideration, laid them back again in the ancient sea-chest.

Next he put the room in order; washed the

dishes slowly and methodically; emptied and set aside the bath; swept the floor, made up the fire, and placed on the table food for his mother's breakfast when she should wake. Then he took up his spade and went out to his delving, just as the steamer whistled at the entrance to the voe.

He had been some while at work when the St. Sunniva, having discharged her business and picked up her passengers, once more headed for the open sea. He looked anxiously at the deck, where several figures could be distinguished, knowing that he himself would be plainly visible against the gray background of the house. He thrust his spade into the ground, and took out his handkerchief ready to wave. There came a sudden flutter from the lower deck, — from Osla, among the third-class passengers. He remembered now some tale of her going to Lerwick. He responded, but kept his eyes aft. By the time that the steamer was abreast of Framgord, no first-class passengers were to be seen; they had all gone below, to breakfast.

Terval looked down for a moment at his foot resting on the spade, and stared at his coarse, earth-stained shoe; then fell to his delving with a fierceness that brought the sweat to his brow.

CHAPTER XXXII

RIPENING

THE year that Barbie and her bairns had come and gone, the year that word of Eric had drifted ashore, the year that Joan's hopes had blossomed and died, was drawing to its close; and neither to Terval nor to Meggy-Betty had it brought outward change. It might be that there was a difference; but none knew — least of all themselves.

These were the days when the islands were like all the gems in the world set in a turquoise sea; when the air was rich with the humming of bees, when the lark sang in the afterglow of midnight above the up-springing corn; when the old folk put on touches of bright color; when the young sang for pure joy of life.

These were the days between the sowing and the reaping, when Terval, with less work for his hands to do, fell into the old way of dreaming. Sometimes in the early morning, while his mother was asleep, he would lie on the jutting rocks below Framgord and watch the young sun turning the mica into diamonds. Often as he lay there, he

would see the homing boats, black against the keen light, burdened to the water's edge with their shining harvest, or clipping the crests of the waves — according to the hazard of the sea.

Sometimes as he lay looking down at the boats with their ruddy crews, content with the bread that they had drawn from the waves, — and even empty-handed — the stronger for the free elemental life that made them men, he had a strange sense of being chained to the rock, and sighed for the heritage of toil on the waters to him only denied.

Then he would turn, seeking his contentment in the ring of homesteads about the voe. But the peace of the home fields, the Manse with its scrub willows and honeysuckle, the double row of little boats on the sandy beach, the turf dykes, the peat stacks, the patches of garden, the slow upward spirals of smoke that now and again drifted across and half hid the black-tarred kitchens, — all the dear familiar things filled him with strong impatience for the land and its life. If once a man's mind is warped by the swinging of the sea — ? He found the answers to some questions in the broad silence of the moorlands, to others in the slash and suck of the waters about gigantic broken cliffs.

The rock that he loved best faced the channel by which the fishing-boats went *fram* into the infinite

open sea. There a man might forget all the island barriers that checked the spirit, and wander the highroad to Norway, or wait patiently for the rush back of the tide, blue and full of sucking whirlpools when it beat against strong wind, — wait for what might come over the sea from Norway. If a man waited — yea, yea, if he waited — but what then? There was no getting beyond.

As little as might be he went down among the toon-folk now. He felt that the women's tongues were loosened as he passed along; and all the old men's eyes showed something — it might be pity — that was hard to bear.

And Meggy-Betty? She was busy among the herring-gutters at the great trough by the landward end of the pier. Unsightly enough in her oilskin apron, blood-stained and flecked with fish-scales, her hands clumsy with protective bandages, she stood all day in the reek of fresh entrails and the stench of several inches of old scales on the ground. Sometimes when the draught was heavy, she had her tea with the others by the fishing-station on an empty barrel, with a thick cloud of gulls all about, splashing and screaming over the offal that had been thrown to them. And there were nights when they worked by torchlight until all the toon was dark and still.

The most of the time, when she thought at all, she was counting up how long, with her bounty at the first of the season and her eight shillings a day, the present heavy catch must last before she would have money enough for the renting of a croft when the next was to be got. A slow and painful matter — Meggy-Betty's sum; but she did it over again and again, and every time it seemed clear that she must win. Any woman that had a wee but-and-ben of her own — blessings on the herring! — was bound to be happy — happy enough. . . . When, as rarely happened, she had a glimpse of Terval on the hill or the road across the voe, she would forget and stand holding her knife and the dripping fish until the foreman swore at her.

Jewel-bright July deepened into August, and still the fine weather held; the heather was a mantle on the hills, the oat-fields were a pinkish yellow, the potatoes showed sprays of purple-white blossom. The young folks were happy bringing in the hay in the glow of the sweet summer; but the old folk watched for weatherheads and talked of storms. And the harvest was very near.

One sparkling day, near sunset, Terval left his mother peacefully knitting and seeming more her old self than usual, and went out on the hills to seek a lost pony. He followed the new road to The

Hara as far as it was made, and when he came to the bridge at the end, went up along the side of the Laxaburn, until he reached the high moorlands where the tiny stream had cut for itself a deep channel through the earth.

There, as he peered over the banks in search of the lost animal, he came unexpectedly upon Joan Robertson, sitting upon a large boulder amid-stream, just where the burn parts and slides down a steep incline in a double waterfall.

Joan looked up with startled eyes, and when she made out Terval's broad shoulders and grave face, tried vainly to speak as usual.

But he saw that something was amiss, and after studying her in silence a moment, leaped down, and selecting a big stone under one of the banks, sat upon it, with the observation, "I 'm seeking a pony."

"I 'm no your pony," she answered, with an odd little laugh.

"Na, na, but you might have seen her?" he asked.

"I 'm no seen any of your ponies," she said, shaking her head. "What likena pony was it?"

"The wee brown one with the spotted face."

"I 'm no seen her."

They sat silent, Terval fanning himself with his cap, for he had been walking fast, and the air was

close. Presently his eyes fell upon a cluster of white heather, shining silvery against her dark stuff skirt.

"It 's pretty," said she idly, "and it — they say — it brings good luck."

"In love," he added, and then turned away from her pathetic face. After a little she began to break the stems into small bits, and to drop the pieces, one by one, into the stream.

"Why — ?" he began.

"There 's no luck for me in the world," was her bitter answer.

"Wait seven year," he said, understanding her mood, yet at a loss for words of comfort.

Dumbly she told off the time on her fingers, as if trying to feel how long that might be.

"It 's bound to turn," he said, and to divert her thoughts, asked, "How 's Osla, the day?"

"She 's well enough, carin' for the old woman. And Nenie 's happy. They 're all happy." . . .

She rose and stood on her boulder, looking down on the stream that foamed and glinted valleywards. A sprig of heather that had clung to her dress dropped into the whirling water. Terval caught it on the very brink of the cascade.

"Put it in your cap," said Joan softly. "It might be your luck."

He did so, smiling to himself at the foolishness; but she had soon forgotten.

"Would it hurt me much, think you, to fall from here?"

"It would kill you, I doubt."

"So? There was a lass — you 'm heard of the silly lass in Colvidale that drooned herself, just because — just because" —

"If she wasna daft, she were worse," he said sternly.

But Joan seemed indifferent: "Think you?"

And in that moment a swift, heavy shower of rain was upon them.

"Come you here under the banks," he commanded. "Then you 'll no be wet at all."

She obeyed at once, and sat so far behind him in the shadow that he could not see her without turning in a very awkward manner.

"Terval," she pleaded, "if I was to tell you now — You 're no so happy yourself, I ken."

"I 'm well enough," he answered gruffly.

"Na, na, but there 's a look about you" —

"Never mind the look" — he was still curt — "I 'm right enough."

"But there 's a difference — I ken fine. Is you ever — has you ever — was you ever seekin' anybody, Terval?"

He turned and faced her over his shoulder. Her pale face was illuminated with a wavering blush, her long narrow eyes looked at him shyly from under a cloud of hair, one slender hand with its delicate wrist held her hap together, covering mouth and chin. There was a heavy drift of rain down the hollow of the burn, while he studied her in silence.

There came over him a sudden new and strange feeling — a longing to seize the little hand and wrist — to draw the girl close — to shelter her. . . .

His face burned while he wondered at the meaning of this; yet before he spoke it was gone.

"Na, na," he said slowly, repressing a tinge of contempt at her forwardness. After all, she was of alien stock — that old, unaccountable dark people. She could not be judged by his standards.

"Na, na, Joan," — he smiled at his own relief from the strange oppression that had come and gone, — "what? An old hulk like me?"

"You was young once," she said, under her breath. "But you 're like the others; ye wouldna understand."

"Try, then," he suggested.

But she shook her head.

He had some dim sense of the trouble in her eyes, and laid his horny fingers on her little brown hand, scratched, but not yet spoiled by rough work.

"There 'll be rainbows at the end of the burn when the storm 's past," he said.

"I canna wait," she said, in a hopeless tone.

"And you seventeen, lass."

"It doesna matter."

"I 'm older as you, Joan. When you was a bairn in the cradle I was already the master at Framgord; and I ken" —

"Does you ken a way for me?" she pleaded.

"Weel" — he plucked a long blade of grass and bit the end of it as he considered. "It seems that you 're thinkin' a deal about happiness just now. What call you bein' happy?"

"Havin' what you want in the world," was her cry.

"So?" he answered quietly. "Then I canna help ye, for I ken nothing about that."

"What is it, then?" she whispered.

"Just ownin' your soul in peace."

She looked at him, startled and uncomprehending.

"But ye 'll know nothing o' that, I doubt. It 's this way. Some folk takes their troubles by the throat and strangles them at arm's length, — I canna put it very well, — and others just takes them in — in a way of speaking — and bids them welcome — makes friends o' them. . . . But you understand no word of it all, lass."

She had got to her feet and stood looking away from him down the valley, which was now spanned by one perfect rainbow and three *brynics* — broken arches of others.

He was aware that she was breathing with quick, uneven gasps; then with a feeling that he must not look upon her trouble, he stared at the burn, now clouded gray and overflowing its banks almost to his boots.

The next moment the thing was done. She had leaped; he had caught her where before he had saved the sprig of white heather, and was himself swaying on the brink, with his one hand clutching the mossy boulder, the other stiffened about the girl, who struggled fiercely to be free of him. It seemed to him hours that he stood knee-deep among the bubbles, wrestling for a footing and holding the girl with the grip of death. Darkness swayed before his eyes and the roar of the torrent shut out thought, but the strength of his hands held. Yet the longer that he clung to the rock, the more dizzily spun the tide about him. He shut his eyes, and jamming one foot between two stones, resolutely faced up stream. It was easier so: he could meet the rush squarely in the face — it was a good fight — there was joy in it. Step by step he slanted upwards to the shore, and when he came

out under the over-hanging bank, Joan had ceased to struggle.

A moment he stood there, wiping his wet face upon his sleeve, and recovering even breath. Then he looked down and saw her eyes bent upon him strangely.

He tried to set her on her feet, but she would have fallen had he not held her firmly against him.

"Well, Joan?" he said, as she did not stir. In the silence that followed, his shattered senses seemed to withdraw into their fortress of reserve; and yet there was a quickening of the pulse while he held the girl to his shoulder.

She turned her face upward so that it almost touched his beard.

"What?" she asked huskily.

He made no answer. In the swift, mad awakening of life in him, she, the cause, was unheeded.

She repeated her question more clearly, with a faint stir away from him.

Suddenly he thrust her forward, strongly and rudely, and held her for a moment by the shoulders, while his eyes blazed upon her. "Geng your ways home, and pray ye be forgiven!" he said, with a fierceness that brought a cry to her lips.

She drew the ends of her wet hap across her face, and strove to obey; but he would not yet let her go.

It was something more than the pressure of his hands that drew at length her eyes to his face. In the look that passed between them she gave the promise that he claimed; yet the look left him shaken.

"Can you go alone?" was all that he said.

"Yea, yea," she murmured; and began slowly to descend the path by the burn.

He watched her, knowing that she was safeguarded for the day against her own destruction; but fairly undone by the revelation of unknown experience that had burst upon him.

He walked homeward with bent head, having forgotten why he came forth, and when he drew near to the road he mused upon a shadow that waited to meet him. In a flash the presence of Joan had vanished, and he knew how it would be if another woman came thus — the clear-faced woman of the sagas, with her sea-blue eyes and the magic net of her hair. . . .

Then he looked up towards the low-lying sun and beheld the minister; and straightway read the message in his eyes.

"My mother is dead," said he, stopping short.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"THERE'S OTHER WAYS"

In silence the two men traversed the road to Framgord, and at the gate the minister hesitated; but Terval stood aside for him to enter. As they approached, the ben door, which had been ajar, was softly closed.

They went into the kitchen, and there, leaning against the chimney-shelf, Terval listened to the other: "It must have happened all in a moment. There was nothing to be done. A woman came in and found her so. The doctor has been and gone. It was the heart."

The world seemed to have moved far away, and nothing was real but the thought that he had not been here at the end.

Keith studied him a while, not understanding the nature of his grief; but feeling instinctively that scriptural comfort would fall upon barren soil. It was clear that the man asked for no sympathy. But the silence grew unbearable; he began to stumble through conventional phrases.

It seemed that Terval did not comprehend what

was being said, for it was St. Paul's own words that he cut short with a gesture.

"Who found her?"

"Meggy-Betty."

"I will be going in."

"No, the women are busy."

After another silence the little man turned away with a sob in his throat. "I cannot say much, Terval, because I know too well" —

"Aye, aye, ye ken," said Terval, and asked presently, "Is she — your wife — so bad, then?"

"Not yet. But it 's the beginning of the end, and there 's nothing to hope for. I should n't have brought her north at all. But it 's God's will."

"Maybe so," answered Terval slowly. "I dona ken about that. But a man shouldna fail in his duty, and I was away."

For all that, the minister who gripped his hand in silence as he turned away was, by the look of him, the more grief-stricken man of the two.

It was Meggy-Betty who came in presently to Terval sitting alone. From the threshold was a sound of subdued whispering among several other women who awaited her. Behind them strange gleams of pearl and amber streaked sky and voe; and far away to the eastward were the shifting rays of the light on the Skerries.

"Is there no more as we can do?" asked Meggy-Betty.

He seemed to become aware of the women's whispering, which then ceased, before he answered that there was nothing.

"I — we will come up again and make your supper," she continued, standing very still by the side of his chair.

"No need of that," he answered.

"And Magnie will be coming to" —

"No need at all — no need," he repeated monotonously.

With that the women moved away, and Meggy-Betty slowly followed them.

When he looked up he perceived that the world was quite gone, and only the Guest remained, gazing at him steadfastly across the hearth.

It was a long while after, that upon suddenly shifting his foot he trod upon something soft. He turned up the wick of the lamp that Meggy-Betty had remembered to light and leave burning low, and found his mother's knitting lying just as it had dropped from her hands. When he took up the sock — designed for himself, as he knew well — the yarn snapped, for he still held the ball unwittingly under his boot. So quickly had the thread of her life been cut. . . .

There crept into his brain a sudden fear and suspicion that brought him to his feet with the swift intent to search. But no, it was all just as he had left it. The peat fire that he had made up for her was scarcely yet burned away. Her spectacles lay on the table, her shawl across the back of the resting chair, where she had thrown it upon her return from the byre after a visit to the new calf. He stood for a while with his head sunk in his hands, then took up the light and went ben.

It was late when he came back, and mechanically setting the lamp in the entry window for the guidance of late wanderers, stood at the open door, looking across the voe.

The amber streaks were gone; the night was wan, alike cloudless and starless, and the hills lay densely black in the steely mirror of the waters. The air was full of the mellow dampness of the autumn; the scent of it reminded Terval that the harvest would begin next week.

Involuntarily his eyes strained to the open sea, invisible beyond the islands, and his soul spread sudden wings of exultation that neither remorse nor the presence of death could restrain. He was free, — free to wander, free to seek and find all the things he had missed, free to work and live as he pleased in the great pulse of life, free to learn,

to feel, to do. Unconsciously he had passed through the garden and down to the cliffs, drawn by the voice of the still waters.

It seemed to him then that all the things set aside rose before him out of the waveless deeps; and among them she came — the Norse woman, tall and proud and silent, with eyes like the unsounded sea, and hair the gold of the oat-fields, with strong arms, open to hold bairns, children of Vikings, — a woman fearless to know, to bear, to do. She came, speaking with a voice. . . .

A voice strangely familiar, calling his name down the hill-slope, — a voice gentle, caressing, with an undertone of sadness. . . .

He turned and looked up, and for the moment illusion and reality were so blended that the voice seemed to belong to the dream woman; then out of the mist he perceived dimly the face of Meggy-Betty.

"Come home, Terval," she was saying.

He did not move from his place by the sea, and she descended and stood by his side. She could not have known what he was thinking: a sail-boat — the free road — and Norway, only a week — a week!

"Meggy-Betty," he began abruptly, "you said once you would be willing to live at Framgord?"

A moment she pondered before it came upon her, with a wild flutter of hope, what he might be meaning. Then she remembered that his mother was just dead; he would not rightly know what he was saying. Yet she had to make answer.

"We can speak of such-like things later."

"I shall be going away in a week," he said.

In the silence that followed she knew that her hope was still-born.

While they stood together, heavy cloud-masses had climbed above the hills in the west, and as the moon now rose over the crest of Hevdigarth, they watched the growing splendor of a lunar rainbow that spanned the voe.

"It will be raining upon the moors," said Meggy-Betty, scarcely aware that she had spoken, and feeling with wonder that the hand she had drawn across her cheeks was wet.

To Terval the moment brought a strange, swift foreboding that the hopes he had sown and husbanded these many years were no more to be gathered than yonder lovely growth from the fickle moon that waxed and waned as he looked. There was no harvest — none.

As he stood bewildered in the clutches of this new thought, Meggy-Betty made a slight sound, and he spoke her name.

To his amazement she seemed to be wiping away tears, and although she began incoherent words about his supper being laid out for him, and the need for her to go home again, he said hastily, without foreknowledge of what was on his lips: —

"If I shouldna be able to go, after all, Meggy-Betty?"

She had no answer for that.

"I'm heard of a man was chained in prison a score o' years; and when he tried to walk again, he couldna."

She shook her head, not understanding what he would be at.

"And there's some has wandered to the end o' the world, and no found the things they went out to seek. I dona ken" — his tone grew kinder — "ye've always been my friend, Meggy-Betty."

"I would like to be that," she answered simply.

After a time: "If I go, ye should have the croft, you and your father" —

"Na, na," she cried, lifting her head proudly; "no unless we paid you the worth of it."

He gave little heed to that: "And if I bide" —

"It's maybe better that you should go," she began. (O Meggy-Betty, is this the whole of your urging?)

She read in his eyes — the moon was bright

upon them now — that he had worked his way to some conclusion. After a long silence he said : —

" I canna put it into words, and it 's maybe no right to speak of such-like things just now, but it 's in my mind that I canna go at all. It 's like — like as if *she* held me the more now that she canna hold me at all." . . .

She looked as if she understood, but said only, " Magnie and Mester Keith 's within. I 'll be going home now."

She turned to descend the brae, but he called after her, " But for all that " —

She waited, her face in shadow.

" For all that — about the croft " —

He could not get on, and she went a step or two lower.

For the very illumination that was dazzling his soul, he stumbled the more in his speech : —

" There 's other ways — other ways — we 'll no speak of it now — other ways for you to be comin' to — to Framgord." . . .

When a little while later Meggy-Betty walked homeward round the voe, she covered her face with her hands to hide even from the darkness her great joy.

HARVEST

When a man cannot go to sea as he would, he has a way of now and then putting out for piltocks and sillocks along the shore. In the stillness of summer evenings, with the sun high overhead, he steadies his little boat among the rocks, and leaning over the side watches the sandy bottom blotched with tang many feet below, until he has drawn out his supper; then he sails quietly homeward towards the broken lights of the sunset, with no sound about him except the *chug* and splash of his own oars, if the sail has dropped limply against the mast; and all the while his face is to the shelter of the hills, and his back to the untried highway of the world. It is strange then if he be not content. The wild places of the earth are for the adventure of wild youth; it is harborage that a man needs — a safe place where his soul may grow into a sense of the rightness of heaven and hell, and of the midway paths between in which we all walk.

Until wee Eric opened his blue eyes upon the Skerries lighthouse, with the air of one who had

known it from the beginning, there was always an undefined fear at the bottom of Meggy-Betty's heart. It was never very clear to her, when she came to think it over, how she happened to be living at Framgord, with a but-and-ben and a man of her own. Indeed, there were times when she wondered at the situation even more than did the neighbors — if that were possible.

There was small opportunity for talking it over with Terval. She had always her carding and spinning and knitting to do, after the house had been cleaned and the animals cared for; and he, when he was done with the reaping or delving, or whatever it might be, had creels to make and household tools to fashion or mend. And when they did talk, it was very often about some book he had been reading. It was no matter that she did not understand very well; he would explain and tell about it as long as she could keep awake — and longer.

And yet at first fear was with her. The winter before Eric was born, she knew many a time the pangs that Osla had lived through, years before. It was not that her husband showed restlessness or discontent. It was rather that when he yielded to the influence of his pipe, and her eager willingness to listen, she first understood fully that he was one

of those who might have gone into the outer world — beyond the rim of the islands — and made a name for himself. There were times, when he was away from the house, that her knitting lagged as she pondered whether she could urge him to go, as she had once done — as she should have done, she told herself, that last summer — but when he came in, ruddy with wind and spray and frost, or bringing the last of the sun's glow in his beard, there was always a look in his eyes — a kindness for her — that drove the words from her lips. Sometimes she tried to tell herself that it was for the sake of the bairnie that was to come, she kept silence; but in the end she knew that it was for her own selfish heart.

But Terval had no suspicion of her struggle; and was well content. No more than Meggy-Betty could he remember how the momentous change had come about; but he knew that with his understanding that his late freedom was no freedom at all, had awakened in him a new life that was compensation. And then again, the old life throve and expanded under Meggy-Betty's loving care. At the very first she had insisted that the joiner make him a table that could stand always by the kitchen window, with shelves on the wall overhead for his books and papers. And whenever Tommy Bruce

went about among the houses with his pack of books, she would have it that he should buy more than he could read in a winter.

Yes, yes, though little was said about it, this was a good time for both of them.

The night that the boy was born, in the seed-time of the earth, when the April rains were lisping soft chorus without, and the sea was still, after Terval had held in his arms a little while the living thing that was himself and herself and yet another, he said only, "Eric," and turned away. They left him alone presently, with the old deeds and genealogies that he had got out with a great pretense at business; but for all that he sat there alone while Meggy-Betty was asleep, he had read never a word when the day broke.

Within a fortnight, Meggy-Betty was up by the fire; and there was always a neighbor or two over against her on the settle. These were the only days that Osla ever left her old woman, or gave her cause to grumble. Once Joan Robertson came, and told Meggy-Betty shyly — that so it might reach Terval before the banns were read — that Johnny Moar, Charlie's brother, had — Meggy-Betty leaned forward and kissed her, to show that she understood.

Young Eric was mighty with his hands and feet;

and in the first of his grapplings with the world got into a way of clinging to his big father, like a limpet to a rock, a thing that more than any other eased Meggy-Betty's heart from the fear of losing Terval.

It has been said already that he had an instinctive understanding of lighthouses. When he was three weeks old it was clear to everybody that he knew the difference between a piltock and a sillock. At four months he was given to grave consideration of weatherheads. His first essay at getting across the floor looked remarkably like swimming, as Terval pointed out. His first flight beyond the garth was headed straight for the cliffs, whence he was diverted under strong protest.

In feature he was Norse enough to satisfy even the critical eye of his father: clear-skinned, blue-eyed, flax-haired, with remarkably high nose and cheek-bones, even in babyhood. Laura Manson was heard to say that he was ugly; but the word was not repeated at Framgord.

The great event of last year was Eric's first essay at the fishing. It was on St. John's Eve, the weather being fine enough even for Meggy-Betty's anxious heart. She and Wag watched the big man and the little man sailing out on the voe in the red-sailed boat that Terval had bought; and she

and Wag watched them homewards into the voe, along the road, and up the brae, with a string of fish glinting in the sunlight. And young Eric rode his father with more zest and ferocity than ever wee Christy had done.

Meggy-Betty's eyes were full of questions as she set the piltocks a-boiling, and laid the table; but Terval, though he smiled a little, looked down as if in deep thought, and at first said nothing.

When she presently came up to the settle, Wag stood there, grinning unreproved, though his dusty feet had tracked the floor, at a mighty fishing enterprise, in which Saemundson the younger had just succeeded in hauling ashore two enormous black haddies, exactly the size and shape of sea-boots.

The fisherman at first protested against the washing process suggested by Meggy-Betty, but upon being assured by his father that no true Viking ever refused to eat as much soap as his mother pleased, he suffered in a tense silence. And there was peace in the room until the piltock boiled over.

"Ask him how he liked the fishin'," said Terval presently.

Young Eric looked rather disgusted at the folly of the question; but suddenly sat erect, illuminated.

"I steered," he crowed shrilly.

"Meggy-Betty," said Terval, struggling to keep the pride down, "we shall make a man of him yet."

In the look that passed between them, they knew that the best of their harvest was hope, the hope of the world — in a little child.

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